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THE COLLECTED POEMS OF EDMUND GOSSE

OTHER WORKS BY
MR. EDMUND GOSSE

Northern Studies. 1879.
Life of Gray. 1882.
Seventeenth-Century Studies. 1883.
Life of Congreve. 1888.
A History of Eighteenth-Century Literature. 1889.
Life of Philip Henry Gosse, F.R.S. 1890.
Gossip in a Library. 1891.
The Secret of Narcisse: a Romance. 1892.
Questions at Issue. 1893.
Critical Kit-Kats. 1896.
A Short History of Modern English Literature. 1897.
Life and Letters of John Donne. 1899.
Hypolympia. 1901
French Profiles. 1904.
Life of Jeremy Taylor. 1904.
Life of Sir Thomas Browne. 1905.
Father and Son. 1907.
Ibsen. 1908.

Edmund Gosse.

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THE COLLECTED POEMS OF EDMUND GOSSE

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PREFACE

Most of these verses appeared in certain volumes, which, after being several times re-issued, have now long been out of print. They are almost unknown to readers of the present day, and their titles, which had their moment of notoriety, are, I believe, forgotten. These were their names, with their dates of publication:

On Viol and Flute, 1873.
New Poems, 1879.
Firdausi in Exile, 1885.
In Russet and Silver, 1894.

There are other collections, which I need not specify, but, whatever the year of publication, the verses belong in essence to a period which has ceased to exist, to an age which is as dead as the dodo. If I permit them to be reprinted, it is with a hope that they may, here and there, and for a little while, awaken an echo in ears that now for the first time become aware of them. I should like, if possible, to reach a new generation, since the old one has nearly passed away.

There must always be something pathetic to an elderly man in revisiting the recollections of his youth, and nowhere can those recollections be so poignant as in the verses with which, however artlessly, he expressed the passions, the reveries, the tender hopes and fears of adolescence. After thirty

years he may hesitate to examine again what he now remembers scarcely more clearly than does his most indifferent reader. It is not without alarm and emotion that I turned to pages that had been unopened so long. They recalled to me much that may perhaps no longer be found in them by strangers; they revived many sensations in myself which may well have evaporated for the nerves of others; the sincerity with which I know that they were written, the ecstasy of interpretation, the sweetness of response to the appeal of nature, may not have been sufficient to provide that fugitive charm which alone keeps verse alive. I cannot tell; I put them forth with a strange timidity. They pleased once: it is at least just possible that they may please again.

There is nothing in which fashion alters so rapidly as it does in poetry. I have followed every successive change in it with curiosity, and I believe with sympathy. I shall know myself to be old indeed when I can no longer vibrate to the music of the latest poets of our race, and I have not yet found that I am unable to respond to their challenge. But I should make a vain pretence if I presumed to work upon their lines; I admire them in their advance, but I do not attempt to follow it. Any one who has the patience to turn over these pages will not need to be told that the voice is not of 1911—it is of 1872, or of a still earlier date—since my technique was determined more than forty years ago, and what it was it has remained. I believe that a verse-writer learns his business suddenly, at the dawn of manhood, and that he continues in a state of metrical equilibrium till his skill as a craftsman falls from him. If I am a poet at all, I belong to the age of the Franco-German War, of the introduction of Japanese art into

Europe, of the discoveries of Huxley and Häckel, and of the Oxford lectures of Matthew Arnold. I smile at this list of names, as a buttercup might smile to find itself rooted on a battlefield; but such is the intellectual topography of these rhymes.

To this collection I have been persuaded to add a reproduction of Mr. Sargent's portrait of the author, never before published; for this he has given his kind consent. The picture was painted a quarter of a century ago, and it represents what I was, not what I am. But so do these verses, which I now leave to their fate.

EDMUND GOSSE

September 1911

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ON VIOL AND FLUTE

PRELUDE

Take hands with me, dear unknown friend, and find
Some downy hollow, sheltered from the wind,
Where summer meadows overlook the sea;
There let us, in the grass at length reclined,

Hold converse, while the melting air around
Is full of golden light and murmuring sound,
And let your soul shine frankly upon me,
And I will tell the best my heart has found.

But first hold up against the light your wrist,
Where blue veins hide like unhewn amethyst,
So shall I know that you have bodily fire,
And purple that the sacred sun hath kissed.

Else, if your blood be chilly, go your way,—
I have no songs to sing to you to-day;
The goal to which our lyric hearts aspire
Must be the very core of life in May.

1873

THE WHITETHROAT

I HEARD the Whitethroat sing
Last eve at twilight when the wind was dead,
And her sleek bosom and her fair smooth head
Vibrated, ruffling, and her olive wing
Trembled. So soft her song was that it seemed
As though, in wandering through the copse at noon,
She must have found the holy bough where dreamed
The day-struck Nightingale,
And, listening, must have overheard too soon
The dim rehearsal of that golden tale
That greets the laggard moon.

But through the imitative strain,
Between each gentle cadence, and again
When those clear notes she tried, for which her throat
Was not so capable as fain,
I joyed to hear her own peculiar note
Through all the music float.
And when the gentle song, that streamed away,
Like some enamoured rivulet that flows
Under a night of leaves and flowering may,
Died on the stress of its own lovely pain,—
Even as it died away,
It seemed as if no influence could restrain
The notes from welling in the Whitethroat's brain;
But, with the last faint chords, on fluttering wing
She rose, until she hung in sunset air;
A little way she rose, as if her care
Were all to reach the heavens, her radiant goal,
Then sank among the leaves.
Pathetic singer! with no strength to sing,

And wasted pinions far too weak to bear
The body's weight that mars the singing soul,
In wild disorder, see, her bosom heaves
Scarcely, with quivering plumes,
She wins the sparse bough of that tulip-tree,
Whose leaves unfinished ape her faulty song,
Whose mystic flowers her delicate minstrelsy.
But, hark! how her rich throat resumes
Its broken music, and the garden blooms
Around her, and the flower that waited long,
The vast magnolia, rends its roseate husk,
And opens to the dusk;
Odour and song embalm the day's decline.
Ah! pulsing heart of mine,
Flattered beyond all judgment by delight,
This pleasing harmony, this gentle light,
This soft and enervating breeze of flowers,
This magic antechamber of the night
With florid tapestry of twilight hours,
Is this enough for thee?
Lo! from the summit of the tulip-tree
The enamoured Whitethroat answered, "Yes! O yes!"
And once again, with passion and the stress
Of thoughts too tender and too sad to be
Enshrined in any melody she knew,
She rose into the air;
And then, oppressed with pain too keen to bear,
Her last notes faded as she downward flew.

And she was silent. But the night came on;
A whisper rose among the giant trees,
Between their quivering topmost boughs there shone
Broad liquid depths of moonlight-tinted air;
By slow degrees

ON VIOL AND FLUTE

Full wanton night stole on me unaware.
The wizard silence of the hours of dew
Fell like a mystic presence more and more,
Awing the senses. Then I knew,
But scarcely heard, shot through to the brain's core,
The shrill first prelude of triumphant song,
Cleaving the twilight. Ah! we do thee wrong,
Unequalled Philomela, while thy voice
We hear not; every gentle song and clear
Seems worthy of thee to our poor noonday choice.
But when thy true fierce music,—full of pain,
And wounded memory, and the tone austere
Of antique passion,—fills our hearts again,
We marvel at our light and frivolous ear.

Ah! how they answer from the woodland glades!
How deep and rich the waves of music pour
On night's enchanted shore!
From starlit alleys where the elm-tree shades
The hare's smooth leverets from the moon's distress,
From pools all silvered o'er,
Where water-buds their petals upward press,
Vibrating with the song, and stir, and shed
Their inmost perfume o'er their shining bed,
Yea, from each copse I hear a bird,
As by a more than mortal woe undone,
Sing, as no other creature ever sang,
Since through the Phrygian forest Atys heard
His wild compeers come fluting one by one,
Till all the silent uplands rang and rang.

THE RETURN OF THE SWALLOWS

"Out in the meadows the young grass springs,
  Shivering with sap," said the larks, "and we
Shoot into air with our strong young wings,
  Spirally up over level and lea;
Come, O swallows, and fly with us
Now that horizons are luminous!
  Evening and morning, the world of light,
  Spreading and kindling, is infinite!"

Far away, by the sea in the south,
  The hills of olive and slopes of fern
Whiten and glow in the sun's long drouth,
  Under the heavens that beam and burn;
And all the swallows were gathered there,
Flitting about in the fragrant air,
  And caught no call from the larks, but flew
  Flashing under the blinding blue.

Out of the depths of their soft rich throats
  Languidly fluted the thrushes, and said:
"Musical thought in the mild air floats,
  Spring is coming and winter is dead!
Come, O Swallows, and stir the air,
For the buds are all bursting unaware,
  And the drooping eaves and the elm-trees long
  To hear the sound of your low, sweet song."

Over the roofs of the white Algiers,
  Flashingly shadowing the bright bazaar,
Flitted the swallows, and not one hears
  The call of the thrushes from far, from far;

ON VIOL AND FLUTE

Sighed the thrushes; then, all at once,
Broke out singing the old sweet tones,
  Singing the bridal of sap and shoot,
  The tree's slow life between root and fruit.

But just when the dingles of April flowers
  Shine with the earliest daffodils,
When, before sunrise, the cold clear hours
  Gleam with a promise that noon fulfils,—
Deep in the leafage the cuckoo cried,
Perched on a spray by a rivulet side,
  "Swallows, O Swallows, come back again,
  To swoop, and herald the April rain.

And something awoke in the slumbering heart
  Of the alien birds in their African air,
And they paused, and alighted, and twittered apart,
  And met in the broad white dreamy square,
And the sad slave-woman, who lifted up
From the fountain her broad-lipped earthen cup,
  Said to herself, with a weary sigh,
  "To-morrow the swallows will northward fly!"

THE APOTHEOSIS OF ST. DOROTHY

A MAIDEN wandering from the East,
  A saint immaculately white,
  I saw in holy dream last night,
Who rode upon a milk-white beast;
  Across the woods her shadow fell,
  And wrought a strange and silent spell,
    A miracle.

With firm-set eyes, and changeless face,
  She passed the cities one by one;
  Her hair was coloured like the sun,
And shed a glory round the place;
  Where'er she came, she was so fair,
  That men fell down and worshipped there
    In silent prayer.

And ever in her sacred hands
  She bore a quaintly carven pyx
  Of serpentine and sardonyx,
The wonder of those Eastern lands;
  Wherein were laid, preserved in myrrh,
  The gifts of vase and thurifer
    She bore with her.

And after many days she came
  To that high mountain, where are built
  The towers of Sarras, carved and gilt
And fashioned like thin spires of flame:
  Then like a traveller coming home
  She let her mild-eyed palfrey roam,
    And upward clomb.

Oh! then methought the turrets rang
With shouting, joyous multitudes,
And through the tumult interludes
Of choral hosts, that played and sang;
Such welcome, since the world hath been,
To singer, prophetess or queen,
Was never seen.

Its golden gates flung open wide,
The city seemed a lake of light,
For chrysoprase and chrysolite
Were wrought for walls on every side;
Without, the town was meet for war,
But inwardly each bolt and bar
Shone like a star.

Then, while I wondered, all the sky
Above the city broke in light,
And opened to my startled sight
The heavens immeasurably high,
A glorious effluence of air,
And shining ether, pure and rare,
Divinely fair.

And, rising up amid the spires,
I saw the saintly maiden go,
In splendour like new-fallen snow,
That robs the sunrise of its fires;
So pure, so beautiful she was!
She rose like vapoury clouds that pass
From dewy grass.

Between her palms, the pyx of gold
She held up like an offering sent
To Him, who holds the firmament

And made the starry world of old;
It glimmered like the golden star
That shines on Christmas eve afar,
Where shepherds are.

And clouds of angels, choir on choir,
Bowed out of heaven to welcome her,
And poured upon her nard and myrrh,
And bathed her forehead in white fire,
And waved in air their gracious wings,
And smote their kindling viol-strings
In choral rings.

But she, like one who swooning sees
A vision just before he dies,
With quivering lips and lustrous eyes
Gazed up the shining distances;
But soon the angels led her on
Where fiercer cloudy splendour shone,
And she was gone.

And then a voice cried: "This is she
Who through great tribulation trod
Her thorny pathway up to God,
The blessed virgin Dorothy.
Still to the blessed Three-in-One
Be glory, honour, worship done
Beneath the sun!"

LYING IN THE GRASS

To Thomas Hardy

Between two russet tufts of summer grass,
I watch the world through hot air as through glass,
And by my face sweet lights and colours pass.

Before me, dark against the fading sky,
I watch three mowers mowing, as I lie:
With brawny arms they sweep in harmony.

Brown English faces by the sun burnt red,
Rich glowing colour on bare throat and head,
My heart would leap to watch them, were I dead!

And in my strong young living as I lie,
I seem to move with them in harmony,—
A fourth is mowing, and that fourth am I.

The music of the scythes that glide and leap,
The young men whistling as their great arms sweep,
And all the perfume and sweet sense of sleep,

The weary butterflies that droop their wings,
The dreamy nightingale that hardly sings,
And all the lassitude of happy things,

Is mingling with the warm and pulsing blood
That gushes through my veins a languid flood
And feeds my spirit as the sap a bud.

Behind the mowers, on the amber air,
A dark-green beech-wood rises, still and fair,
A white path winding up it like a stair.

And see that girl, with pitcher on her head,
And clean white apron on her gown of red,—
Her even-song of love is but half-said:

She waits the youngest mower. Now he goes;
Her cheeks are redder than a wild blush-rose;
They climb up where the deepest shadows close.

But though they pass and vanish, I am there;
I watch his rough hands meet beneath her hair,
Their broken speech sounds sweet to me like prayer.

Ah! now the rosy children come to play,
And romp and struggle with the new-mown hay;
Their clear high voices sound from far away.

They know so little why the world is sad,
They dig themselves warm graves and yet are glad;
Their muffled screams and laughter make me mad!

I long to go and play among them there;
Unseen, like wind, to take them by the hair,
And gently make their rosy cheeks more fair.

The happy children! full of frank surprise,
And sudden whims and innocent ecstasies;
What godhead sparkles from their liquid eyes!

No wonder round those urns of mingled clays
That Tuscan potters fashioned in old days,
And coloured like the torrid earth ablaze,

We find the little gods and loves portrayed,
Through ancient forests wandering undismayed,
Or gathered, whispering, in some pleasant glade.

ON VIOL AND FLUTE

They knew, as I do now, what keen delight
A strong man feels to watch the tender flight
Of little children playing in his sight.

I do not hunger for a well-stored mind,
I only wish to live my life, and find
My heart in unison with all mankind.

My life is like the single dewy star
That trembles on the horizon's primrose-bar,—
A microcosm where all things living are.

And if, among the noiseless grasses, Death
Should come behind and take away my breath,
I should not rise as one who sorroweth;

For I should pass, but all the world would be
Full of desire and young delight and glee,
And why should men be sad through loss of me?

The light is dying; in the silver blue
The young moon shines from her bright window through:
The mowers all are gone, and I go too.

FORTUNATE LOVE

IN SONNETS AND RONDELS

I

FIRST SIGHT

WHEN first we met the nether world was white
And on the steel-blue ice before her bower
I skated in the sunrise for an hour,
Till all the grey horizon, gulphed in light,
Was red against the bare boughs black as night;
Then suddenly her sweet face like a flower,
Enclosed in sables from the frost's dim power,
Shone at her casement, and flushed burning bright
When first we met!
My skating being done, I loitered home,
And sought that day to lose her face again;
But Love was weaving in his golden loom
My story up with hers, and all in vain
I strove to lose the threads he spun amain,
When first we met.

II

ELATION

Like to some dreaming and unworldly child
  Who sits at sunset in the mist of hope,
  When all the windows of the west lie ope,
Flooding the air with splendour undefiled,
And sees, by fancy in a trance beguiled,
  An angel mount the perilous burning slope,
  Winning the opal and the sapphire cope,
And laughs for very joy and yearning wild;—
So I, in whose awakening spirit Love
  Rules uninvited, not to be controlled,
  Am happiest when I struggle not, but hold
My windows open and my heart above,
  Watching, with soul not bowed nor overbold,
The stately air with which his footsteps move.

III

IN CHURCH-TIME

I took my flute among the primroses
That lined the hill along the brown church-wall,
For she was there; till shades began to fall,
I piped my songs out like a bird at ease,
When suddenly the distant litanies
Ceased, and she came, and passed beyond recall,
And left me throbbing, heart and lips and all,
And vanished down the vistaed cypress-trees;
Ah! sweet, that motion of harmonious limbs
Drove all my folly hence, but left me faint!
Oh! be not, my desire, so wholly saint,
That I must woo thee to the rhythm of hymns!
Ah, me! my dizzy brain dissolves and swims!
And all my body thrills with fond constraint!

IV

DEJECTION AND DELAY

CANST thou not wait for Love one flying hour,
O heart of little faith? Are fields not green
Because their rolling bounty is not seen?
Will beauty not return with the new flower?
Because the tir'd sun seeks the deep sea-bower
Where sleep and Tethys tenderly convene,
While purple night unfurls her starry screen,
Shall sunlight no more thrill the world with power?
True Love is patient ever; by the brooks
He hath his winter-dreams, a fluent choir,
And waits for summer to revive again;
He knows that by-and-by the woodland-nooks
Will overflow with blossoming green fire,
And swooping swallows herald the warm rain.

V

EXPECTATION

WHEN flower-time comes and all the woods are gay,
  When linnets chirrup and the soft winds blow,
  Adown the winding river I will row,
And watch the merry maidens tossing hay,
And troops of children shouting in their play,
  And with my thin oars flout the fallen snow
  Of heavy hawthorn-blossom as I go,—
And shall I see my love at fall of day
  When flower-time comes?
Ah, yes! for by the border of the stream
  She binds red roses to a trim alcove,
And I may fade into her summer-dream
Of musing upon love,—nay, even seem
  To be myself the very god of love,
  When flower-time comes!

VI

IN THE GRASS

Oh! flame of grass, shot upward from the earth,
  Keen with a thousand quivering sunlit fires,
  Green with the sap of satisfied desires
And sweet fulfilment of your sad pale birth,
Behold! I clasp you as a lover might,
  Roll on you, bathing in the noonday sun,
  And, if it might be, I would fain be one
With all your odour, mystery and light,
    Oh flame of grass!
For here, to chasten my untimely gloom,
  My lady took my hand, and spoke my name;
  The sun was on her gold hair like a flame;
The bright wind smote her forehead like perfume;
  The daisies darkened at her feet; she came,
As Spring comes, scattering incense on your bloom
    Oh flame of grass!

VII

RESERVATION

Her terrace looking down upon the lake
  Has corners where the deepest shadows are,
  And there we sit to watch the evening-star,
And try what melody our lutes can make;
Our reticent hearts with longing almost break,
  The while her gleaming eyes strain out afar,
  As though her soul would seek the utmost bar
Where faltering sunset quivers, flake by flake;
My forehead rests against the balustrade;
  My cheeks flush hot and cold; my eager eyes
  Are fixed on hers until the moon shall rise,—
The splendid moon of Love,—and unafraid
The utmost debt of passionate hope be paid,
  And all be given that now her heart denies.

VIII

BY THE WELL

Hot hands that yearn to touch her flower-like face,
With fingers spread, I set you like a weir
To stem this ice-cold stream in its career,—
And chill your pulses there a little space;
Brown hands, what right have you to claim the grace
To touch her head so infinitely dear?
Learn courteously to wait and to revere,
Lest haply ye be found in sorry case,
Hot hands that yearn!
But if ye bring her flowers at her behest,
And hold her crystal water from the well,
And bend a bough for shade when she will rest,
And if she find you fain and teachable,
That flower-like face, perchance, ah! who can tell
In your embrace may some sweet day be pressed,
Hot hands that yearn!

IX

MAY-DAY

THE Past is like a funeral gone by,
The Future comes like an unwelcome guest,
And some men gaze behind them to find rest,
And some urge forward with a stifled sigh;
But soft perennial flowers break forth and die,
And sweet birds pair and twine a woodland nest;
They, sifting all things, find the Present best,
And garnish life with that philosophy.
Like birds, like flowers, oh! let us live To-day,
And leave To-morrow to the Fates' old fingers,
And waste no weeping over Yesterday!
Lo! round about the golden lustre lingers,
The fresh green boughs are full of choral singers,
And all the Dryades keep holiday.

X

MISTRUST

THE peacock screamed and strutted in the court,
The fountain flashed its crystal to the sun,
The noisy life of noon was just begun,
And happy men forgot that life was short;
We two stood, laughing, at the turret-pane,
When some Apollo of the ranks of Mars,
Crimson with plumes and glittering like the stars,
Galloped across below, and there drew rein.
To see so confident a man-at-arms
My heart sank suddenly from sun to shade,
But she, who knows the least of Love's alarms,
Laid one soft hand upon my throbbing wrist,
And in her eyes I read the choice she made,
And anger slumbered like a tired child kissed.

XI

EAVESDROPPING

WHILE May was merry in the leafy trees,
I found my fair one sitting all alone,
Where round our well the long light ferns had grown
So high, so deep, that she was drowned in these,
And her bright face and yellow buoyant hair
Scarce peered above them, where she sat and read,
Flecked by the leaf-lights wavering overhead,
A great black-letter book of verses rare;
Wherein old Chaucer, years and years ago,
Wove the sad tale of Cryseydè untrue,
And Troylus yearning with a broken heart;
At last she, sighing, shut the rhythmic woe,
And let her sweet eyes dream against the blue,
And swore she would love truly, for her part.

XII

A GARDEN-PIECE

Among the flowers of summer-time she stood,
And underneath the films and blossoms shone
Her face, like some pomegranate strangely grown
To ripe magnificence in solitude;
The wanton winds, deft whisperers, had strewed
Her shoulders with her shining hair outblown,
And dyed her breast with many a changing tone
Of silvery green, and all the hues that brood
Among the flowers;
She raised her arm up for her dove to know
That he might preen him on her lovely head;
Then I, unseen, and rising on tiptoe,
Bowed over the rose-barrier, and lo!
Touched not her arm, but kissed her lips instead,
Among the flowers!

XIII

CONFIDENT LOVE

Now all day long we wander hand in hand,
And taste of love in many wondrous ways;
And still my fingers tremble with amaze
To find they rest in hers at her command;
We sit together in the sweet corn-land,
Her light head quivering on my sunburnt throat,
The while the gold threads of her loose hair float
Along my shoulder by the light wind fanned:
And thus for many days we lightly played
Shepherd and shepherdess with mimic crook,
And sunned and shaded in the elm-tree's nook;
Until the newness of our love decayed,
And then we rose and left the heights and strayed
Along the glen and down beside the brook.

XIV
LOVER'S QUARREL

BESIDE the stream and in the alder-shade,
Love sat with us one dreamy afternoon,
When nightingales and roses made up June,
And saw the red light and the amber fade
Under the canopy the willows made,
And watched the rising of the hollow moon,
And listened to the water's gentle tune,
And was as silent as she was, sweet maid,
Beside the stream;
Till with "Farewell!" he vanished from our sight,
And in the moonlight down the glade afar
His light wings glimmered like a falling star;
Then ah! she took the left path, I the right,
And now no more we sit by noon or night
Beside the stream!

XV
RECONCILIATION

But wandering on the moors at dawn of day,
When all the sky was flushed with rosy hue,
I saw her white robe dabbled in the dew,
Among the sparkling heather where she lay;
Sobbing, she turned from me, and murmured "Nay!"
Then rising from the ground, she strove anew
To turn away, but could not stir, and flew
At last into my arms the old sweet way;
And Love, that watched us ever from afar,
Came fluttering to our side, and cried, "O ye,
Who think to fly, ye cannot fly from me;
Lo! I am with you always where you are!"
Yet henceforth are we twain and are not three,
Though Love is on our foreheads like a star.

XVI

THE FEAR OF DEATH

BENEATH her window in the cool, calm night
I stood, and made as though I would have sung,
Being full of life and confident and young,
And dreaming only of young love's delight;
Then suddenly I saw the gloom divide,
And gliding from the darkest cypress-tree
Death came, white-boned, and snatcht my lute from me,
And sat himself, grimacing, by my side.
Just then, as when the golden moon looks down
On starless waters from a stony sky,
My love's fair face shone out above on high;
Whereat I, fearing nothing of Death's frown,
Turned smiling to salute her lovely head,
And when I turned again, lo! Death had fled!

XVII
EXPERIENCE

DEEP in the woods we walked at break of day,
And just beyond a whispering avenue,
Where all the flowers were nodding, full of dew,
We heard a sound of speaking far away;
And turning saw a pale calm queen assay
To tell that Love was cruel and untrue,
To knots of girls in white robes and in blue,
Who round her feet, while listening, lounged and lay,
Deep in the woods.
But we two crushed the moss with silent feet,
And passed aside unseen; for what to us,
Who knew Love's breath, and fanned its passionate heat,
And laughed to hear our hearts' twin pulses beat,
Were tuneless songs of maidens murmuring thus,
Deep in the woods?

XVIII
THE EXCHANGE

LAST night, while I was sitting by her side,
And listening to her bodice' silken stir,
And stroking her soft sleeves of yellow fur,
I gave the sweet who is to be my bride
A little silver vinaigrette, star-eyed,
And chased with Cupids; and received from her
The gold-embossed pomander-box of myrrh
She pounced her white hands with at eventide.
My sleep till dawn was all consumed with thirst,
And passionate longing; then the great sun's light
Burst through my flimsy dreams, and nothing tells
Of all the joy that gladdened me last night,
Except this little golden box that smells
As her sweet hands did when I kissed them first.

XIX
UNDER THE APPLE-TREE

AGAINST her breast I set my head, and lay
  Beneath the summer fruitage of a tree,
  Whose boughs last spring had borne for her and me
The fleeting blossom of a doubtful day;
That rose and white had tasted swift decay,
  And now the swelling fruits of certainty
  Hung there like pale green lamps, and fair to see,
And I was strong to dream the hours away
    Against her breast:
Her satins rustled underneath my head,
  Stirred by the motions of her perfect heart,
But she was silent, till at last she said,—
While all her countenance flushed rosy-red,—
  "Dear love! oh! stay forever where thou art,
    Against my breast!"

XX

EPITHALAMIUM

High in the organ-loft, with lilied hair,
  Love plied the pedals with a snowy foot,
  Pouring forth music like the scent of fruit,
And stirring all the incense-laden air;
We knelt before the altar's gold rail, where
  The priest stood robed, with chalice and palm-shoot,
  With music-men, who bore citole and lute,
Behind us, and the attendant virgins fair;
And so our red aurora flashed to gold,
  Our dawn to sudden sun, and all the while
The high-voiced children trebled clear and cold,
  The censer-boys went singing down the aisle,
And far above, with fingers strong and sure,
Love closed our lives' triumphant overture.

THE MÆNAD'S GRAVE

THE girl who once, on Lydian heights,
  Around the sacred grove of pines,
Would dance through whole tempestuous nights
  When no moon shines,
Whose pipe of lotus featly blown
Gave airs as shrill as Cotys' own,—

Who, crowned with buds of ivy dark,
  Three times drained deep with amorous lips
The wine-fed bowl of willow bark,
  With silver tips,
Nor sank, nor ceased, but shouted still
Like some wild wind from hill to hill,—

She lies at last where poplars wave
  Their sad gray foliage all day long,
The river murmurs near her grave
  A soothing song;
Farewell, it saith! Her days have done
With shouting at the set of sun.

A YEAR

WHEN the hot wasp hung in the grape last year,
And tendrils withered and leaves grew sere,
There was little to hope and nothing to fear,
  And the smouldering autumn sank apace,
And my heart was hollow and cold and drear.

When the last gray moth that November brings
Had folded its sallow and sombre wings,
Like the tuneless voice of a child that sings,
  A music arose in that desolate place,
A broken music of hopeless things.

But time went by with the month of snows,
And the pulse and tide of that music rose;
As a pain that fades is a pleasure that grows,
  So hope sprang up with a heart of grace,
And love as a crocus-bud that blows.

And now I know when next autumn has dried
The sweet hot juice to the grape-skin's side,
And the new wasps dart where the old ones died,
  My heart will have rest in one luminous face,
And its longing and yearning be satisfied.

ON VIOL AND FLUTE

THE ALMOND-TREE

PURE soul, who in God's high-walled Paradise
  Dost walk in all the whiteness of new birth,
And hear'st the angels' shrill antiphonies,
  Which are to heaven what time is to the earth,
    Give ear to one to whom in days of old
  Thou gavest tears for sorrow, smiles for mirth,
    And all the passion one poor heart could hold!

Behold, O Love! to-day how hushed and still
  My heart is, and my lips and hands are calm;
When last I strove to win you to my will,
  The angels drowned my pleading in a psalm;
    But now, sweet heart, there is no fear of this,
  For I am quiet; therefore let the balm
    Of thy light breath be on me in a kiss!

Alas! I dream again! All this is o'er!
  . . . See, I look down into our garden-close,
From your old casement-sill where once you wore
  The ivy for a garland on your brows;
    There is no amaranth, no pomegranate here,
  But can your heart forget the Christmas-rose,
    The crocuses and snowdrops once so dear?

But these, like our old love, are all gone by,
  And now the violets round the apple-roots
Glimmer, and jonquils in the deep grass lie,
  And fruit-trees thicken into pale green shoots;
    Thy garth, that put on mourning for thy death,
  Is comforted, and to the sound of lutes
    Dances with spring, a minstrel of bright breath.

But I am not yet comforted, O Love!
  Does not the aureole blind thy gentle eyes?
That crimson robe of thine the virgins wove
  Trammels thy footsteps with its draperies,
    Else thou would'st see, would'st come to me, if even
  The Cherubim withstood with trumpet-cries,
    And barred with steel the jewelled gates of heaven!

In vain, in vain! Lo! on this first spring morn,
  For all my words, my heart is nearer rest,
And though my life, through loss of thee, is worn
  To saddest memory by a brief dream blest,
    I would not mar one moment of thy bliss
  To clasp again thy bright and heaving breast,
    Or fade into the fragrance of thy kiss.

Yet would an hour on earth with me be pain?
  A greater boon than this of old was won
By her, who through the fair Sicilian plain
  Sought her lost daughter, the delicious one,
    With tears and rending of the flowery hair;
  And sang so deftly underneath the sun,
    That Hell was well-nigh vanquished by her prayer.

Hail, golden ray of God's most blessed light!
  Hail, sunbeam, breaking from the faint March sky!
What rosy vision melts upon my sight?
  What glory opens where the flashes die?
    Surely she comes to me on earth, and stands
  Among the flowerless lingering trees that sigh
    Around her, and she stretches forth her hands.

Her hands she stretches forth, but speaketh not,
And all the bloom and effluence round her rise
That crown her heavenly saintship with no spot,
Herself the fairest flower in Paradise;
Draw near and speak to me, O Love, in grace,
And let me drink the beauty of thine eyes,
And learn of God by gazing in thy face.

Tempt not my passion with such lingering feet,
My trembling throat and strained white lips are numb;
Through black twined boughs I see thy body, sweet!
Robed in rose-white, thou standest calm and dumb!
Oh heart of my desire, no more delay,
Yet nearer in thy cloudy glory come,
Yet nearer, or in glory fade away!

Fade then, sweet vision! fail, O perfect dream!
There is no need of words of human speech;
The sightless ecstasy of thought I deem
A loftier joy than mortal sense can reach;
No more, ye flowers of spring, shall my dull song
Be heavy in your ears, but, each to each,
My love and I hold converse and be strong.

The mystic splendour pines away, and leaves
Its fainter shadow in the almond-tree,
Whose cloud of bloom-white blossom earliest cleaves
The waste wan void of earth's sterility;
Before the troop of lyric Dryades,
Veiled, blushing as a bride, it comes, and see!
Spring leaps to kiss it, glowing in the breeze.

ON VIOL AND FLUTE

While life shall bring with each revolving year
  Its winter-woes and icy mystery,
This fair remembrance of the sun shall bear
  Fresh thoughts of Love re-risen in memory;
    Old hopes shall blossom with the west wind's
      breath,
  And for her sake the almond-bloom shall be
    The white fringe on the sable pall of death

1871.

OLD AND NEW

I

B.C.

Come, Hesper, and ye Gods of mountain waters,
  Come, nymphs and Dryades,
Come, silken choir of soft Pierian daughters,
  And girls of lakes and seas,
Evoë! and evoë Io! crying,
  Fill all the earth and air;
Evoë! till the quivering woods, replying,
  Shout back the echo there!

All day in soundless swoon or heavy slumber,
  We lay among the flowers,
But now the stars break forth in countless number
  To watch the dewy hours;
And now Iacchus, beautiful and glowing,
  Adown the hill-side comes,
Mid tabrets shaken high, and trumpets blowing,
  And resonance of drums.

The leopard-skin is round his smooth white
    shoulders,
  The vine-branch round his hair,
Those eyes that rouse desire in maid-beholders
  Are glittering, glowworm-fair;
Crowned king of all the provinces of pleasure,
  Lord of a wide domain,
He comes, and brings delight that knows no
    measure,
  A full Saturnian reign.

ON VIOL AND FLUTE

Take me, too, Mænads, to your fox-skin chorus,
  Rose-lipped like volute-shells,
For I would follow where your host canorous
  Roars down the forest-dells;
The sacred frenzy rends my throat and bosom!
  I shout, and whirl where He,
Our Vine-God, tosses like some pale blood-blossom
  Swept on a stormy sea.

Around his car, with streaming hair, and frantic,
  The Mænads and wild gods
And shaggy fauns and wood-girls corybantic
  Toss high the ivy-rods;
Brown limbs with white limbs madly intertwining
  Whirl in a fiery dance,
Till, when at length Orion is declining,
  We glide into a trance.

The satyr's heart is faintly, faintly beating,
  The choir of nymphs is mute;
Iacchus up the western slope is fleeting,
  Uncheered by horn or flute;
Hushed, hushed are all the shouting and the
    singing,
  The frenzy, the delight,
Since out into the cold gray air upspringing,
  The morning-star shines bright.

II

A.D.

Not with a choir of angels without number,
And noise of lutes and lyres,
But gently, with the woven veil of slumber
Across Thine awful fires,
We yearn to watch Thy face, serene and tender,
Melt, smiling, calm and sweet,
Where round the print of thorns, in thornlike splendour,
Transcendent glories meet!

We have no hopes if Thou art close beside us,
And no profane despairs,
Since all we need is Thy great hand to guide us,
Thy heart to take our cares;
For us is no to-day, to-night, to-morrow,
No past time nor to be,
We have no joy but Thee, there is no sorrow,
No life to live but Thee.

The cross, like pilgrim-warriors, we follow,
Led by our eastern star;
The wild crane greets us, and the wandering swallow
Bound southward for Shinar;
All night that single star shines bright above us;
We go with weary feet,
But in the end we know are they who love us,
Whose pure embrace is sweet.

Most sweet of all, when dark the way and moonless,
To feel a touch, a breath,
And know our weary spirits are not tuneless,
Our unseen goal not Death;

ON VIOL AND FLUTE

To know that Thou, in all Thy old sweet fashion,
Art near us to sustain!
We praise Thee, Lord, by all Thy tears and passion,
By all Thy cross and pain!

For when this night of toil and tears is over,
Across the hills of spice,
Thyself wilt meet us, glowing like a lover
Before Love's Paradise;
There are the saints, with palms and hymns and roses,
And better still than all,
The long, long day of bliss that never closes,
Thy marriage festival!

FEBRUARY IN ROME

When Roman fields are red with cyclamen,
And in the palace-gardens you can find,
Under great leaves and sheltering briony-bind,
Clusters of cream-white violets, O then
The ruined city of immortal men
May smile, a little to her fate resigned;
And through her corridors the slow warm wind
Gush harmonies beyond a mortal ken.
Such soft Favonian airs upon a flute,
Such shadowy censers burning live perfume,
Shall lead the mystic city to her tomb;
Nor flowerless springs, nor autumns without fruit,
Nor summer-mornings when the winds are mute,
Trouble her soul till Rome be no more Rome.

GREECE AND ENGLAND

Would this sunshine be completer,
Or these violets smell sweeter,
Or the birds sing more in metre,
  If it all were years ago,
  When the melted mountain-snow
  Heard in Enna all the woe
Of the poor forlorn Demeter?

Would a stronger life pulse o'er us
If a panther-chariot bore us,
If we saw, enthroned before us,
  Ride the leopard-footed god,
  With a fir-cone tip the rod,
  Whirl the thyrsus round, and nod
To a drunken Mænad-chorus?

Bloomed there richer, redder roses
Where the Lesbian earth encloses
All of Sappho? where reposes
  Meleager, laid to sleep
  By the olive-girdled deep?
  Where the Syrian maidens weep,
Bringing serpolet in posies?

Ah! it may be! Greece had leisure
For a world of faded pleasure;
We must tread a tamer measure,
  To a milder, homelier lyre;
  We must tend a paler fire,
  Lay less perfume on the pyre,
Be content with poorer treasure!

ON VIOL AND FLUTE

Were the brown-limbed lovers bolder?
Venus younger, Cupid older?
Down the wood-nymph's warm white shoulder
  Trailed a purpler, madder vine?
  Were the poets more divine?
  Brew we no such golden wine
Here, where summer suns are colder?

Yet for us too life has flowers,
Time a glass of joyous hours,
Interchange of sun and showers,
  And a wealth of leafy glades,
  Meant for loving men and maids,
  Full of warm green lights and shades,
Trellis-work of wild-wood bowers.

So while English suns are keeping
Count of sowing-time and reaping,
We've no need to waste our weeping,
  Though the glad Greeks lounged at ease
  Underneath their olive-trees,
  And the Sophoclean bees
Swarmed on lips of poets sleeping!

THE MANDRAKES

A STUDY IN GROTESQUE

Prorex. And whither must these flies be sent?
Oberon. To everlasting banishment.
The woods are yew-trees, bent and broke
By whirlwinds; here and there an oak
Half cleft with thunder. To this grove
We banish them.
Culprits. Some mercy, Jove!
Oberon. You should have cried so in your youth,
When Chronos and his daughter Truth
Sojourned among you: when you spent
Whole years in riotous merriment.
DAY'S *Parliament of Bees*, 1607.

WHETHER in meditation or in dream,
Or whether in the circle of known lands
I walked, I cannot tell; the crested stream
Of the great waters breaking on the sands,
The far brown moors, the gulls in white-winged bands,
Seem too clear-coloured on my memory
To be the ghosts of any phantasy.

Along the sweep of an untrodden bay,
Towards a great headland that before me rose,
Full merrily I held my sunny way;
And in that atmosphere of gold, and snows,
And pure blue fire of air and sea, the woes
Of mortals and their pitiful despair
Seemed vague to my glad spirit void of care.

The long bluff rose against the sea, and thrust
Its storm-proof bosom far into the deep,
And many a breaker, many a roaring gust

Disturbed the calm of its primeval sleep,
Through the gray winter twilight; there did creep
In swarthy trefoil, or salt-blighted grass,
A token where the uncurb'd sea-wind did pass.

So even in the bright and pure June air
The place seemed vestured in unholy guise;
The loneliness was like a pain to bear,
I sought about, with strangely troubled eyes,
For bird or flower to glad me in some-wise,
In vain; then at the utmost verge I stayed
Where far beneath the refluent thunders swayed.

Then as I stood upon the precipice,
Drinking the sunlight and sharp air like wine,
I heard, or thought I heard, a murmur twice,—
First, like a far-off shrieking, clear and fine,
Then like an anxious shouting for a sign
To careless boatmen steering o'er the rim
Of rocks,—but both behind me and both dim.

But even while, not turning, in my mind
I thought how very lonely the place was,—
The rushing of the steadfast wings of wind
Being empty of all common sounds that pass,
The song of birds, or sighing in the grass,—
Then suddenly a howl to rend the skies
From the bare land behind me seemed to rise.

And while my skin was wrinkled with affright,
I noticed far and far away, an isle,
With faintest waves of jagged pale blue light,
Skirt the horizon, land not seen erewhile;—
This in a flash of thought; such sights beguile
Our hearts in wildest moments, and we know
Not clearly after how it could be so.

But in a second, ere the long shriek died,
I turned to see whence came this note of woe,
And marked on the down's topmost hollow wide
One lonely scrawling gnarled tree that did grow,
Coiling its leafless branches stunt and low,
Midmost the promontory; thither I
Drawn by some hate-spell felt my way did lie.

It was a shameful tree, the twisted pain
Of its sad boughs and sterile hollow stem
Took fearful forms of things that are man's bane,
And circling drops of oozings did begem
Its twigs with a dull poisonous anadem;
It had no bright young leaves to tell of Spring,
Nor clustering moss that hallowed eld doth bring.

And at its foot were forms that had no shape,
Unmoving creatures twisted like the tree,
With horrid wooden faces set agape
And bodies buried in the earth; to see
Such human features moulded terribly
Sent all the life-blood surging to my heart,
And mine own breath was ready to depart;

When one most awful visage bent the roots
That were its jaws, and moaning, slowly spake:
"O mortal, what assemblage of soft lutes
Rings now across the silvery waves that break
Along the city, where the shadows make
In tremulous calm lines of sunset fire
A magic image of each dome and spire?"

He questioned thus in strained voluptuous tones;
His hideous feet deep in the ground were set;
His body fashioned without skin or bones

Was like the mystic figure of smooth jet
Egyptian priests wore in an amulet,
What time they mourned Osiris; like a shriek
His pained voice ended sharply, forced and weak.

Then when I answered nothing, once again
He spoke—"In what elysium of the blest,
Lapped in sweet airs, forgetful of all pain,
Fulfilling an eternity of rest,
Lies Titian, of all painters loved the best?
Oh! say, in any land where you have been,
Heard you of him and not of Aretine?

"O matchless painter of the noble heart!
Dear friend I loved long centuries ago!
Lean from that golden chamber where thou art,
Above the sun and moon, and lighten so
The utter, endless agony of woe
That fills my wretched being, doomed for aye
Rooted in this foul living grave to stay.

"Ah, mortal, listen! I was once a child
Into whose brain God poured the mystic wine,
Full of pure odours, fragrance undefiled,—
Keen drink to make a poet all divine.
I took the gift; men called me Aretine:
All that was pure and poet-like I spurned,
And to hell-fire for inspiration turned.

"God suffered long with me, and let the fire
Of passionate youth burn to the ash of age,
Saying to the angels, 'Surely when desire
Is dead within him, his true heritage
Will seem more precious to him, and the page
Of the great book shall in the end record
Some prayer, some love, some tender-spoken word.'

ON VIOL AND FLUTE

"Yet I, still impious, burned before my God
The rancid oil of hypocritic prayer,
And with unsanctified, rash footsteps trod
Those shadowy precincts, where the misty air
Is heavy with the sound of hymns, and rare
High spirit-breathings fill the solemn place
Where God meets man, in silence, face to face."

I stood beneath the tree now; all the ground
Was full of these grim shadows of mankind,
And all in some way shamefully were bound
Into the earth, but no two could I find
In which the same quaint shapes were intertwined:
But each was human, yet each had the feature
Of some misshapen thing or hideous creature.

Oh, how the calm around us, and the light
Of pure cerulean æther, full of sun,
Made awful contrast with the shameful blight
Of these foul natures! Him I looked upon
Was like an old man, utterly undone,
With white thin locks, that blew about his eyes,
Like grasses round a stump when summer dies.

Fear held my tongue; I trembled like the leaves
That quiver when the gradual autumn falls
On shadowy Vallombrosa, and bereaves
The forest, full of flowery funerals,—
And all the windy places have their palls
Of yellow leafage, till the noiseless snow
Muffles the rustling of this gusty woe.

At last I murmured, "Cannot rest or death
Forever visit this pale place of tombs?"
And ceased; for, like the sound of a sharp breath

That from the drawn throat of one dying comes,
Whose heart the Master of all breath benumbs,
An answering voice arose, whose calm, intense,
Sad music won my ear with sharp suspense:

"Not vervain, gathered when the dog-star rose,
Not agrimony, euphrasy, or rue,
Not any herb can bring our pain repose,
Nor any poison make our summers few;
Forever our own agonies renew
Our wasted bodies still to suffer pain,
To suffer, pine, renew, and pine again.

"Ah, turn away! behold me not! those eyes
Burn me like lightning with a searing shame;
Gaze not upon these ghastly infamies,
That must deform me worse than maimed or lame,
The ribald children scoff at for their game;
Ah! in what jocund wise I danced and sung
Through the warm Tuscan nights, when life was young!

"These gray and shrunken fingers once were lithe,
And meet for all most dainty handiwork;
Whether a painted coffer for a blithe
Fair bride, or for the Caliph or Grand Turk
A golden chalice, where red wine might lurk
Coiled unforbidden; or for monks' dim eyes,—
Worked in distemper,—hell and paradise.

"Ay me! what lovely fancies I have wrought
In cloisters, or along a church's wall,
Where in a high-fenced garden angels taught
Our Lady at her baby's feet to fall;
There, with his keys, went Peter; there stood Pau
With long brown beard, and leant upon his sword;
And all the virgins, singing, praised the Lord.

"But, best of all, I loved to stand and paint
His face who doubted when the Lord arose,—
Andrew, my ever-blessed patron saint,
Bearing his mighty cross, and worn with woes,
And pining sore from self-inflicted blows,—
His passionate, jealous, loving, hating heart
Seemed every-way my very counterpart.

"He is in glory now, and walks and sings
With saints who take his rough brown hand in theirs,
And sees the angels' silver-spotted wings!
But I convulse the noonday with my prayers,
And in the night-time blast the icy airs
With my shrill pains; hearken for what offence
My soul was doomed to anguish so intense!

"If one man's art can be another's bane,—
If half the swiftest runners miss the goal,—
If thinkers weave out holy thoughts in vain,
Which bless the world and ruin their own soul,—
If bitterness and languor be our dole,—
Why do we seek, so greedily, at all
Laurel, to poison our own brows withal?

"All this is only vanity; but, lo!
For weary years I slowly fought my way
High up the hill of fame, and should I go
Right sadly down again at fall of day,
Because this Domenic, this popinjay,
Could trick a wall out with a newer brush,
And after him all men began to rush?

"When I grew poor, and no man came to me,
One night I lay awake, and by my bed
Heard a low, subtle voice, and seemed to see

A little demon, with a fiery head,
That whispered, 'If now Domenic were dead,
And his new way dead with him, ha! ha! ha!
Luck would come back again to Andrea!'

"So one bright night when singing he went by
I watched him; round his neck a chain of gold
Glittered and lured me like a serpent's eye;
It was the price of some new picture sold:
My nerves grew steel, my veins of fire throbbed cold,
My dagger smote him through the neck, charm-bound,
And like a snake, the chain slid to the ground.

"Ay me! ay me! what cruel, cruel pang
Draws forth this tale of mine own infamy;
Ah, youth! by all the angel choirs that sang
Round holy Christ at His nativity,
I pray thee mock me not, in charity,
Who for one hour of passion and fell spite
Must suffer endless torture infinite."

Then at my side a voice cried, "Look on me!
Stamp on me, crush me, grind me with your heel!
I, even I, this shapeless thing am he
That slandered Sappho! Set on me the seal
Of your undying hatred, let me feel,
Even though I burn with anguish, that men know
Her holy life was ever pure as snow."

Then flattened out, I saw upon the ground
What seemed the hide of some misshapen beast,
With a pinned cord to bind it twisted round;
But lo! its heart in beating never ceased,
And now the flutter of its breath increased,
Barring its body of unhealthy hue
With lurid waves of mingling green and blue.

ON VIOL AND FLUTE

" Of old," a stifled voice proclaimed, " I dwelt
  Deep in the cedar-shades of that high hill,
Whose brow looks down on Lesbos, and the belt
  Of sunlit sea, where rippling laughters fill
  The spaces down to Chios ; thither still,
As gold above the Lydian mountains shone,
Sappho would climb to dream and muse alone.

" How oft her wind-swept hair and kindling eyes
  I watched, unseen within my own rose-bowers,
Her cheek that glowed at her heart's phantasies,
  Bright as the refluent flush of fields of flowers
  Stirred by the light feet of the flying hours,
When, about sunrise, on a morn of May,
Westward they troop, and herald the young day !

" So fair was she in my conceit; but soon
  Her songs were sung from Lesbian town to town,
And other islands claimed the lyric boon,
  And Andros praised, and Paros sent a crown,
  And reverend men, in philosophic gown,
From Greece, from sage Ionia, came to lay
At Sappho's feet the homage of a day.

" Then in my heart the love I bore her grew
  To foulest envy, like the bitter core
That lies in the sweet berry of the yew;
  For I, too, fashioned for the lute, and bore
  Such ivy-wreaths as would-be poets wore ;
But never ode of mine did men repeat,
Singing for glee along the broad white street.

" It happed that through the islands I must go
  To gather tribute, and where'er I came
The youths and girls would gather round to know

ON VIOL AND FLUTE

What news of Sappho, till my heart became
Shrivelled and parched with spite as with a flame,
And evermore I set my subtle tongue
To hint and whisper nameless tales of wrong.

"And soon all lands rang out with that ill-fame,
For little souls delight to think the worst
Of sovereign spirits who have won great name
For virtue or for wit, so all men nursed
And spread the rumour of these tales accursed,
Which smouldered, far from Lesbos, till she died,
Then burst in lurid flames unsanctified.

"So to this limbo my unholy spirit
Was dragged by demons when my pulses sank,
And here forever shall my flesh inherit
More pain than ever human body drank;
See this bruised head, this haggard arm and shank,
The slow contracting pain of centuries
Has drawn the bones into this hideous guise."

Then silence came, save far away the sound
Of waves that rang like timbrels in the air,
Dashing and dying on the shore, steel-bound;
I stood above those lurid shapes in prayer,
Desiring that, if any hope there were,
Quickly their souls and bodies might decay,
And to the sovereign waters fade away.

For to my thought the moaning, sighing sea
Seemed yearning to receive them to its breast,
And fain would let its huge embraces be
Their haven of forgetfulness and rest:—
"O let them die!" I murmured; "It is best!
Have they not fed on anguish all their years?
And drenched the morsel in the wine of tears?

ON VIOL AND FLUTE

"Their pains are greater than the Titan's were,
Hung, a god-man, a sign to man and God,
For his immortal spirit was aware
Of its own immortality, and trod
With head erect beneath the oppressor's rod;
But these are bitten through with their own shame,
And scorcht with infamy as with a flame.

"Wherefore, if Heaven forbid not, let them die!"
The echo of my accents broke in moans
From all the grim and stark fraternity,
That lay in heaps about my feet like stones;
Down to the caverns of my heart their groans
Sank, as a meteor, breeding death and woe,
Slants down the skies on weeping lands below.

Then all the silence grew a mighty sound,
Gathering in voice along the nether sea,
As when, in some Norwegian gulf profound,
Sailors, becalmed along the monstrous lee
Of desolate Torghatten, hear the glee
Of many a riotous and rebel wind,
Deep in the mountain's riven heart confined.

With murmuring of immortal wings it came,
Blown by no wind, and moaned along the deep;
Then hung at last above that place of shame
On plumes of sound, like some great bird asleep,—
Though o'er the blue no cloud nor stain did creep,—
And slowly gave in words articulate
All the vast utterance of the unseen fate.

O thou grave mystic, who, by inner light,
Didst watch the ruddy, throbbing life in flowers,
And shaken by no pitiful affright,

ON VIOL AND FLUTE

Held'st converse with the eternal starry powers;
By all the bliss in full ecstatic hours,
From spirit-tongues, to thee, a spirit, given,
Bow down and aid me from thy lucent heaven!

Blake, loveliest of the sons of shadowy light,
Throned, with dawn-mist for purple, sun for gold,—
Regent above us in all true men's sight,
Among thy kindred angel-ranks enrolled,—
Think not thy latest lover overbold,
If in sore need he for a while prolong
Prayer for thy aid in his most arduous song!

For he must murmur what a spirit sang,
Lisp the weird words no mortal can pronounce;
For all about my head the air now rang
With the dread clarion Voice, that did denounce
The writhing things, and bade my heart renounce
Pity and grief, and drown in obloquy
All hope for these, still dying and to die.

"No temple, and no tripod, and no shrine
Is half so sacred as the soul of man,
Lit with a flame more subtle, more divine,
Than that which round the glimmering altar ran,
With mutterings and with thunders, when the clan
Of Baal-prophets howled, and sank down dead
On the cold parapet their life-blood fed.

"Man is himself the lamp for hallowed use,
The oil that feeds it and the hand that lights,
Each to his brother is the plenteous cruse,
And in the universal gift unites;
So all combine, with sacrificial rites,
Throughout the gleaming world, from bound to bound,
To spread the wealth that old Prometheus found.

ON VIOL AND FLUTE

"And so should all things slowly climb up higher
Into the perfectness of utter rest,
And no least breath of passion stir the fire
That fell from God and burneth in man's breast;
By his own purity should man be blest,
The soul being priest, and worshipper, and shrine,
Bearing God's presence for an outward sign.

"But ah! what punishment would not be meet
To scourge that ribald priest, that should defile
The lintel of his own God's mercy-seat;
Or who, with nimble fingers and smooth wile,
Should from the prostrate worshippers beguile
The sacred gifts of balsam or of myrrh,
To burn in sport where harlot-loves confer?

"Would the vexed God be pitiful and meek,
Nor smite the impious with a thunderbolt,
Clothing the lingering life and hollow cheek
With pain as with a garment? Let the dolt
Go whine and whimper over heath and holt,—
Shall any lovers of the God be found
Whose heart shall melt with pity at the sound?

"Wherefore, if all things sacred, all things pure,
All that makes life worth living for to men,
White chastity, and faith, and honour sure
Have in your heart their answering echoes, then
Cease to be wise above a mortal ken,
And judge that we, whose robes are virtues, know
Where justice rules, and mercy may not go."

As from the heart's-core of a trumpet-blast
May rise the melody of whispering flutes,
A softer music on my ear was cast,

ON VIOL AND FLUTE

Even as I lay among those living roots,
And heard their direful sentence, and the fruits
Of their insane rebellion; sweet and far,
As orchard-singing under a pale star,

That tender fluting rose, but, gathering strength,
Thrilled like a hundred instruments in tune,
Here soft citoles, and here in liquid length
The sobbing of tense harp-strings, and all soon
Rounded with murmurs of the full bassoon,
And all words faded, and I rose, and lo!
A lady standing on the hill of woe.

Adown her shoulders, over the broad breast,
A saffron robe fell lightly to her feet,
Edged quaintly with meander; for the rest,
Her changeful eyes were wonderfully sweet,
Sea-coloured, and her braided hair made meet
Under a fillet of starred myrtle-flowers,
More large and pure than any bloom of ours.

Her face was even as apple-blossom is,
When first the winds awaken it; her mouth
Seemed like the incarnation of a kiss;
A philtre for all sorrow; in heart-drouth
A fountain breathing of the fragrant south;
A cage for songs;—a violin—who knows?
Perchance the rose-tree of the world's great rose!

Kalliope, the eternal Muse, she hight,
Whose lips woke music in Mæonides,
Through all the alternatives of day and night,
Silence and song, that this poor wan world sees,
She walks unchanged, while old divinities
Wither and die, and new creeds spring and fall,
And new flowers hear the new-born cuckoos call.

ON VIOL AND FLUTE

There in her loveliness she stood and spread
  Her arms out to me in most smiling wise,
Saying, "Oh, my servant, in such drearihed,
  Why floats thy spirit in a wind of sighs?
  What ruth and passion gather to thine eyes?
What part hast thou with these? Ah! wayward
    child,
Should I be clement to them?" And she smiled.

O! what a smile! But when she ceased, once more
  I cast my eyes upon the twisted features;
And all the pity that my heart once bore
  To watch the writhing of the loathsome creatures
  Fled from me, for their foul degenerate natures
Scowled under those pure eyes of hers, as hell
Must blacken, seen from heaven's white pinnacle.

She vanished. Then they howled and howled until
  The cave of air, devoid of other sound,
Was full of moaning echoes round the hill;
  Then with my hands my aching ears I bound,
  And rushing from that cruel cursèd ground,
From cleft to cleft leapt downwards to the sea,
Where faint wave-music was as balm to me.

1871.

EUTHANASIA

WHEN age comes by and lays his frosty hands
So lightly on mine eyes, that, scarce aware
Of what an endless weight of gloom they bear,
I pause, unstirred, and wait for his commands;
When time has bound these limbs of mine with bands,
And hushed mine ears, and silvered all my hair,
May sorrow come not, nor a vain despair
Trouble my soul that meekly girded stands.

As silent rivers into silent lakes,
Through hush of reeds that not a murmur breaks,
Wind, mindful of the poppies whence they came,
So may my life, and calmly burn away,
As ceases in a lamp at break of day
The fragrant remnant of memorial flame.

THE PRAISE OF DIONYSUS

CHANT ROYAL

To A. D.

Behold, above the mountains there is light,
A streak of gold, a line of gathering fire,
And the dim East hath suddenly grown bright
With pale aërial flame, that drives up higher
The lurid mists that of the night aware
Breasted the dark ravines and coverts bare;
Behold, behold! the granite gates unclose,
And down the vales a lyric people flows;
Dancing to music, in their dance they fling
Their frantic robes to every wind that blows,
And deathless praises to the vine-god sing.

Nearer they press, and nearer still in sight,
Still dancing blithely in a seemly choir;
Tossing on high the symbol of their rite,
The cone-tipped thyrsus of a god's desire;
Nearer they come, tall damsels flushed and fair,
With ivy circling their abundant hair;
Onward, with even pace, in stately rows,
With eye that flashes, and with cheek that glows,
And all the while their tribute-songs they bring,
And newer glories of the past disclose,
And deathless praises to the vine-god sing.

The pure luxuriance of their limbs is white,
And flashes clearer as they draw the nigher,
Bathed in an air of infinite delight,
Smooth without wound of thorn or fleck of mire,
Borne up by song as by a trumpet's blare,
Leading the van to conquest, on they fare;

ON VIOL AND FLUTE

Fearless and bold, whoever comes or goes,
These shining cohorts of Bacchantes close,
Shouting and shouting till the mountains ring,
And forests grim forget their ancient woes,
And deathless praises to the vine-god sing.

And youths are there, for whom full many a night
Brought dreams of bliss, vague dreams that haunt and tire,
Who rose in their own ecstasy bedight,
And wandered forth through many a scourging briar
And waited shivering in the icy air,
And wrapped the leopard-skin about them there,
Knowing, for all the bitter air that froze,
The time must come, that every poet knows,
When he shall rise and feel himself a king,
And follow, follow where the ivy grows,
And deathless praises to the vine-god sing.

But oh! within the heart of this great flight,
Whose ivory arms hold up the golden lyre?
What form is this of more than mortal height?
What matchless beauty, what inspirèd ire!
The brindled panthers know the prize they bear,
And harmonise their steps with stately care;
Bent to the morning, like a living rose,
The immortal splendour of his face he shows,
And where he glances, leaf and flower and wing
Tremble with rapture, stirred in their repose,
And deathless praises to the vine-god sing.

ENVOI

Prince of the flute and ivy, all thy foes
Record the bounty that thy grace bestows,
But we, thy servants, to thy glory cling,
And with no frigid lips our songs compose,
And deathless praises to the vine-god sing.

THE LOSS OF THE "EURYDICE"

MARCH 24, 1878

TIRED with the toils that know no end,
On wintry seas long doomed to roam,
They smiled to think that March could lend
Such radiant winds to waft them home;
Long perils overpast,
They stood for port at last,
Close by the fair familiar waterway,
And on their sunlit lee
All hearts were glad to see
The crags of Culver through the shining day;
While every white-winged bird,
Whose joyous cry they heard,
Seemed wild to shout the welcome that it bore
Of love from friends on shore.

Ah! brief their joy, as days are brief
In March, that loves not joy nor sun;
O bitter to the heart of grief
The port that never shall be won!
Fair ship, with all sail set,
Didst thou perchance forget
The changing times and treacherous winds of Spring?
And could those headlands gray
Rehearse no tale to-day
Of wrecks they have seen, and many a grievous thing?
Thy towering cliff, Dunnose,
Full many a secret knows,—
Cry out in warning voice! too much they dare;
Death gathers in the air!

ON VIOL AND FLUTE

A wind blew sharp out of the north,
And o'er the island ridges rose
A sound of tempest going forth,
And murmur of approaching snows;
Then through the sunlit air
Streamed dark the lifted hair
Of storm-cloud, gathering for the light's eclipse,
And fiercely rose and fell
The shriek of waves, the knell
Of seamen, and the doom of wandering ships;
As with an eagle's cry
The mighty storm rushed by,
Trailing its robe of snow across the wave,
And gulfed them like a grave.

It passed; it fell; and all was still;
But, homebound wanderers, where were they?
The wind went down behind the hill,
The sunset gilded half the bay;
Ah! loud bewildered sea,
Vain, vain our trust in thee
To bring our kinsfolk home, through storm and tide!
So sharp and swift the blow,
Thyself dost hardly know
Where now they rest whom thou didst bear and guide!
Our human hearts may break,
Cold Ocean, for thy sake,—
Thou not the less canst paint in colours fair
The eve of our despair.

Not hard for heroes is the death
That greets them from the cannon's lips,
When heaven is red with flaming breath,
And shakes with roar of sundering ships:

ON VIOL AND FLUTE

When through the thunder-cloud
Sounds to them, clear and loud,
The voice of England calling them by name;
And as their eyes grow dim
They hear their nation's hymn,
And know the prelude of immortal fame;
But sad indeed is this,
The meed of war to miss,
To die for England, yet in dying know
They leave no name but woe.

They cannot rest through coming years,
In any ground that England owns,
And billows salter than our tears
Wash over their unhonoured bones;
Yet in our hearts they rest
Not less revered and blest
Than those, their brothers, who in fighting fell;
Nor shall our children hear
Their name pronounced less dear,
When England's roll of gallant dead we tell;
For ever shall our ships,
There, at the Solent's lips,
Pass out to glory over their still bed,
And praise the silent dead.

SERENADE

The lemon-petals gently fall
  Within the windless Indian night,
The wild liana'd waterfall
  Hangs, lingering like a ghostly light;
Drop down to me, and linger long, my heart's entire delight.

Among the trees, the fiery flies
  Move slowly in their robes of flame;
Above them, through the liquid skies,
  The stars in squadrons do the same;
Move through the garden down to me, and softly speak my name!

By midnight's moving heart that shakes
  The coloured air and kindling gloom,
By all the forms that beauty takes
  In fruit, in blossom, in perfume,
Come down and still the aching doubts that haunt me and consume!

Else if the chilly morning break
  And thou hast heard my voice in vain,
Unmoved as is a forest-lake
  That through the branches hears the rain,
Beware lest Love himself pass by to bless thee, and—refrain!

TO HENRIK IBSEN IN DRESDEN

WITHIN the bowery window-nook,
My red azalea flowered to-day;
Its colour fell upon the book
That I was reading where I lay,—
Your own sardonic masque of Love,
Wherein, when last azaleas blew,
I read, and marked the light above
Come faintly-tinted through.

And as your gracious verse unfolds
Its fluted meanings, leaf by leaf,
And knows not half the wealth it holds,
Till, gathered in a rosy sheaf,
The full-proportioned flowers of song
Flame, finished, from the perfect tree,
And pour out perfume, pure and strong,
For all the world and me,—

So, now that May is well begun,
And cuckoos in the woodland shout,
My perfect flower that loves the sun
Will spread its faultless petals out;
Each bloom will tell my brain of you,
Norse poet with the tropic heart,
From whose blind root there slowly grew
Such flowers of perfect art!

And while I wait for your new song *
To waft its fragrance o'er the sea,
I hold the memories that belong
To you, to Norway and to me;

* "Kejser og Galilæer."

ON VIOL AND FLUTE

I wander where the wild swan calls,
  And where the dark lake lies and shines,
And watch sonorous waterfalls
  Rush, whitening, through the pines.

You in the city of sweet names,
  Where Raffaelle and Correggio meet,—
I by the dismal-tided Thames,
  In dreary square and sultry street,—
Both, by one magnet drawn, extend
  Our thoughts across the northern deep,
Till both our beings mix and blend
  Where jarls and vikings sleep.

So flies a bridge across the sea
  From you to Norway, clear like glass
A mistier framework, built for me,
  Permits my vaguer hopes to pass;
One link remains unforged, one base
  The wizard's weird triangle needs,
One ray to join us face to face,
  And then our art succeeds.

That link between your land and mine,
  My English and your Norse denies;
Your verses lie like gems that hide
  In coffers sealed from English eyes;
Behind the veil we dimly know
  A solemn figure stands complete,
But feel not how the draperies flow,
  How poised the hands and feet.

For me slow hours have drawn aside
  The curtain that concealed the work;
Diaphanous thin webs still hide,
  And gauzy faint concealments lurk,

But all the gracious form displayed
  Delights me with its sweeping lines,
And every day some progress made
  Decreases what confines.

But oh! to win my people's eyes
  To stand with me—to gaze, admire,
To praise the statue's form and size,—
  That is the goal of my desire;
But, friend, you dream not of the weight
  Of insular phlegmatic pride,
The sturdy self-sufficient hate
  Of all the world beside.

My England, where the grass is deep,
  And burns with buttercups in May,
Whose brookside violets nod in sleep,
  Washed purer purple by the spray;
My England of the August corn,—
  The heavy-headed waving gold,—
Sweet blossoming land from bourne to bourne,
  Whose name and speech I hold,

Receives my homage; none the less
  I deem some precious things may be,
With which the sovereign Muses bless
  The world outside our circling sea;
Some unknown gift the gods may leave
  To be enshrined in alien lands,
A boon we humbly must receive
  From unfamiliar hands.

For you the slow revenge of time
  Will bring the meed your works have won,
When common speech from clime to clime
  Shall link the nations into one;

ON VIOL AND FLUTE

The vast Republic of the arts
  Will crown your deathless fame with bays,
When our poor tongues and beating hearts
  Are dust on trodden ways.

For me what is there? Just to sit
  Beneath my red azalea-tree,
Half in the sun, and flecked with it,
  And with flower-shadows, silently;
To read the strong sonorous verse,
  And think, my poet, now and then,
How, though the times wax worse and worse,
  You walk the world of men.

Till this consoles me, for I know
  That though the nations, old and weak,
Tremble with change, and shivering so,
  With gathered voices shake and shriek,
You tremble not, but brave and strong,
  Pour forth as from a trumpet's mouth,
The great anathemas of song
  Sent northward from the south.

Work then in patience, till you see
  The confines of your Holy Land,
That Palestine of poesy,
  Where Agnes waits for you, and Brand;
Pull on with strenuous arm and oar,
  The sandy bar will soon be past,
And grassy odours from the shore
  Proclaim you home at last!

May 1872.

THE FARM

To Hamo Thornycroft

Far in the soft warm west
There lies an orchard-nest,
Where every spring the black-caps come
And build themselves a downy home.

The apple-boughs entwine,
And make a network fine
Through which the morning vapours pass
That rise from off the dewy grass.

And when the spring-warmth shoots
Along the apple roots,
The gnarled old boughs grow full of buds
That gleam and leaf in multitudes.

And then, first cold and white,
Soon flushing with delight,
The blossom-heads come out and blow
And mimic sunset-tinted snow.

Just where my farmhouse ends
A single gable bends,
And one small window, ivy-bound,
Looks into this enchanted ground.

I sit there while I write,
And dream in the dim light
That floods the misty orchard through,
A pale-green vapour tinged with blue

And watch the growing year,
The flowers that spring and peer,
The apple-bloom that melts away,
The colours of the changing day.

The falling blossom fills
The cups of daffodils,
That loll their perfume-haunted heads
Along the feathery parsley-beds.

And then the young girls come
To take the gold flowers home;
They stand there, laughing, lilac-white,
Within the orchard's green twilight.

The rough old walls decay,
And moulder day by day,
The fern-roots tear them, stone by stone,
The ivy drags them, overgrown;

But still they serve to keep
This little shrine of sleep
Intact for singing birds and bees
And lovers no less shy than these.

Soft perfumes blown my way
Remind me day by day
How spring and summer flowers arrange
Their aromatic interchange.

For, in the still warm night,
I taste the faint delight
Of dim white violets that lie
Far down in depths of greenery.

ON VIOL AND FLUTE

And from the wild white rose
That in my window blows,
At dawn an odour pure and fine
Comes drifting like the scent of wine.

I live in flower and tree;
My own life seems to me
A fading trifle scarcely worth
The notice of the jocund earth.

Nor seems it strange indeed
To hold the happy creed
That all fair things that bloom and die
Have conscious life as well as I.

That not in vain arise
The speedwell's azure eyes,
Pure stars upon the river's brink,
That shine unseen of us, and sink.

That not for Man is made
All colour, light and shade,
All beauty ripened out of sight,
But,—to fulfil its own delight.

The black-caps croon and swing
Deep in the night, and sing
No songs in which man's life is blent,
But to embody their content.

Then let me joy to be
Alive with bird and tree,
And have no haughtier aim than this—
To be a partner in their bliss.

So shall my soul at peace
From anxious carping cease,
Fed slowly like a wholesome bud
With sap of healthy thoughts and good.

That when at last I die,
No praise may earth deny,
But with her living forms combine
To chant a threnody divine.

THE PIPE-PLAYER

Cool, and palm-shaded from the torrid heat,
  The young brown tenor puts his singing by,
  And sets the twin pipe to his lips to try
Some air of bulrush-glooms where lovers meet;
O swart musician, time and fame are fleet,
  Brief all delight, and youth's feet fain to fly!
  Pipe on in peace! To-morrow must we die?
What matter, if our life to-day be sweet!
Soon, soon, the silver paper-reeds that sigh
  Along the Sacred River will repeat
  The echo of the dark-stoled bearers' feet,
Who carry you, with wailing, where must lie
Your swathed and withered body, by-and-by,
  In perfumed darkness with the grains of wheat.

IN THE BAY

Far out to east one streak of golden light
Shows where the lines of sea and heaven unite,—
  White heaven shot through with film of flying cloud,
Gray sea the wind just flutters and makes bright,
  And wakes to music neither low nor loud.

Two horns jut out, and join, and rim the bay,
Save where a snow-white strip of shingle may
  Break through the bar, where, black as black can be,
Their steep and hollow rocks resound all day
  The jarred susurrus of the tumbling sea.

Here on a sunny shelf, while hot the air
Flooded our limbs and faces, brown and bare,
  We lounged and shouted, plashing with slow feet
The warm and tidal pools that wasted there,
  And down below us saw the sea-foam beat.

Then, leaping down together with a cry,
I watched them dash into the waves, and fly
  Around the shallows as a sea-bird bends,
Tossing the froth and streaming, and then I
  Plunged like Arion to my dolphin-friends.

The cool impassive water clung and pressed
Around our buoyant bodies, head and breast;
  Downward I sank through green and liquid gloom,
By all the streams of shoreward seas caressed,
  Dark vitreous depths by faint cross-lights illumed.

And rising once again to sunlit air
We flung the salt-drip back from beard and hair,
  And shouted to the sun, and knew no more
The trodden earth, with all its pain and care,
  But set our faces seaward from the shore.

Then, lo! the narrow streak of eastern light
Along the dark sea's line, began to smite
  Its radiance high up heaven; the flying mist
Sped from the sky, and left it gold and white,
  And made the tossing sea like amethyst.

Midway between the rocks that girt the bay,
An islet rose, of rock as black as they;
  Sombre it stood against the glowing sky,
And two of us swam out to it straightway,
  And cleft the waves with strenuous arm and thigh;

And as I strove and wrestled in the race,
I turned and saw my comrade's merry face;
  The sunlight fell upon his hair, and through
The film of water showed the sinewy grace
  Of white limbs, bright against the sea's green-blue.

So, laughingly, we won the rock, and then
Climbed up and waited for our fellow-men;
  Sat on the eastward brink of it, and let
The cold foam cling upon our feet again,
  And plash our limbs with tangle crushed and wet.

There, holding back the wet hair from my eyes,
The moment seized me with its strange surprise;
  Straightway I lost all sense of present things
And, in the spirit, as an eagle flies,
  I floated to the sunrise on wide wings.

ON VIOL AND FLUTE

Some antique frenzy sliding through my brain
Made natural thought a moon upon the wane,
  Fast fading in a vague and silvery sky;—
I know not if such moments be not gain;
  They teach us, surely, what it is to die.

But suddenly my comrade spoke; the sound
Recalled my soul again to common ground;
  And now, like sea-gods on a holiday,
My friends were tumbling in the foam around,
  And made the waters hoary with their play.

With that, I spread my naked arms, and drew
My hands together o'er my head, and knew
  That all was changing into cool repose,
And while into the pulsing deep I flew,
  My glad heart sang its greeting; ah! who knows

What power the sea may have to understand,
Since all night long it whispers to the land,
  And moans along the shallows, and cries out
Where skerries in the lonely channels stand,
  And sounds in drowning ears a mighty shout?

"Sea that I love, with arms extended wide,
I clasp you as the bridegroom clasps the bride;
  Strong sea, receive me throbbing; close me round
With tender firm embracings! Not denied,
  I plunge and revel in thy cool profound!

"There are who fear thee; what have I to fear?
Lover, whose frowns and very wrath are dear!
  Shake out the odours of the windy waves,
Sound thy dim music that my ears may hear;
  I shall not tremble, though thy channels rave!

"Have I not known thee? Lo! thy breath was mild
About my body when I was a child;
My hair was blanched with sea-winds full of brine;
No voice beguiled me as thy voice beguiled;
The loveliest face my childhood knew was thine!

"Then on the shore in shadow; but to-day
I plunge far out into the sunlit spray;
A child's heart gave thee all a child's heart can,
But now I love thee in a bolder way,
And take the fiercer pastime of a man.

"Nor I alone enjoy thee! Here a score,
Comrades of mine and still a million more
Might leap to thee; thou wouldst rejoice again,
Like her of old whose mystic body bore
As many breasts as there are mouths of men

"Clinging, thy cool spray makes us thine alone;
We have no human passion of our own;
Here all is thine, prone body and dumb soul;
Thine for thy waves to dash, thy foam to crown,
Thy circling eddies to caress and roll!"

With that I shot along the glittering sea,
Parting the foam, and plunging full of glee,
Tossed back my tangled hair, and struck far out
Where orient sunrise paved a path for me,
And whispering waves returned my lyric shout.

Behind me and around me, lithe and fair,
Like Triton-kings at sport my comrades were,—
Some tossing conchs that they had dived to find,
Some spreading ruddy limbs and sunshot hair
To woo the soft cool kisses of the wind.

ON VIOL AND FLUTE

It seemed the sea had heard my hymn of praise,
And laughed beneath the torrid sky ablaze;
  The pure green water lapped us, warm and red;
The sweet life throbbed in us in wondrous ways;
  We let the sunlight stream on hands and head.

Ah! for the sky put off its robe of gold;
A sharp wind blew out of a cloudy fold;
  The bitter sea but mocked us! To the core
The keen breeze pierced us with a cutting cold,
  And sad and numb we huddled to the shore.

So pass life's ecstasies, and yet, ah me!
What sorrow if no change should ever be,
  Since, out of grieving at a present blight,
Come sweeter wafts of garnered memory,
  And sweeter yearning for a new delight.

And but for that chill end in rain and wind,
I know not if my changing brain would find
  On its palimpsest memories of that day,
When full of life and youth and careless mind
  We dashed and shouted in the sunlit bay.

THE BALLADE OF DEAD CITIES

To A. L.

WHERE are the cities of the plain?
  And where the shrines of rapt Bethel?
And Calah built of Tubal-Cain?
  And Shinar whence King Amraphel
  Came out in arms and fought, and fell,
Decoyed into the pits of slime
  By Siddim, and sent sheer to hell;
Where are the cities of old time?

Where now is Karnak, that great fane,
  With granite built, a miracle?
And Luxor smooth without a stain,
  Whose graven scripture still we spell?
  The jackal and the owl may tell;
Dark snakes around their ruins climb,
  They fade like echo in a shell;
Where are the cities of old time?

And where is white Shushan, again,
  Where Vashti's beauty bore the bell,
And all the Jewish oil and grain
  Were brought to Mithridath to sell,
  Where Nehemiah would not dwell,
Because another town sublime
  Decoyed him with her oracle?
Where are the cities of old time?

ENVOI

Prince, with a dolorous, ceaseless knell,
Above their wasted toil and crime
The waters of oblivion swell:
Where are the cities of old time?

THE BATH

WITH rosy palms against her bosom pressed
To stay the shudder that she dreads of old,
Lysidice glides down, till silver-cold
The water girdles half her glowing breast;
A yellow butterfly on flowery quest
Rifles the roses that her tresses hold:
A breeze comes wandering through the fold on fold
Of draperies curtaining her shrine of rest.
Soft beauty, like her kindred petals strewed
Along the crystal coolness, there she lies.
What vision gratifies those gentle eyes?
She dreams she stands where yesterday she stood,
Where, while the whole arena shrieks for blood,
Hot in the sand a gladiator dies.

THE NEW ENDYMION

Behind the ghostly poplar-trees
The moon rose high when Celia died;
To win the flickering midnight breeze
I'd thrown the curtains both aside,
And this was how I came to see,
In my most tearless agony,
The red moon in the poplar-tree.

The scent of lilies, sickly sweet,
Just floated through the shining air,
And the hot perfume of the wheat
Hung like a vapour everywhere;
The anguish of the summer night,
Close, breathless, sultry, still and bright,
Seemed without hope and infinite.

But most the round orb of the moon,
That one by one the branches kissed,
Drawn out of her flushed waking swoon,
And changed to gold above the mist,
Seemed like a rancorous enemy,
Who climbed by stairs into the sky
Better to see my darling die.

And I remembered, hushed at heart,
Without a tear, though she was dead,—
As if my future had no part
In that cold past upon the bed,—
I thought how much the moon had seen
Of happy days that lay between
The sweet may-be and sad has-been.

ON VIOL AND FLUTE

Quivering to feel how, every time
I forged another link of love,
The mystic moon had seemed to climb,
And watch my lips, and hang above;
I shuddered, and my thoughts I cast,
While all my veins were beating fast,
Across my memories of the past.

I thought of one clear tropic night,
When, like a bird, through Indian seas,
Our ship unfolded wings of light,
And lost the land by soft degrees:
She paced the deck; I heard the stir
Of robes, her beauty's minister,
And at the last I spoke to her.

But while our budding fortunes crossed,
Amid her courteous flights of speech,
My careless vision slowly lost
The range of palm-trees on the beach,
Whereat another light began
Behind the isles of Andaman,
And up the golden moonlight ran.

I turned and saw her gentle face,
Those violet moon-shot eyes I saw,
And in that very hour and place
Bent like a vassal to her law;
But yet I dared not speak, and soon
She rose and suddenly had gone,
And left me to the florid moon.

I thought me of a winter street,
And how the first time, on my arm,
I felt her gentle pulses beat
As in a virgin vague alarm;

ON VIOL AND FLUTE

We let the rest pass on before,
And talking lingered, more and more
Hid in the city's kindly roar.

The great crowd caught us in its net,
  And pressed us closer to each other;
We spoke of all since last we met,
  And laughed like sister and like brother;
I all the while, with fixed intent,
Towards some more serious silence bent
To say a certain thing I meant.

In vain,—till out of the blue night,
  Behind the vast cathedral spire,
There swam into our sudden sight
  A globe of honey-coloured fire,
And in the wonder of the view
She hushed her talking, and I knew
How kind her heart was and how true.

I thought, too, of the magic hour
  When in one sacred chamber bound,
She loosed her wreath of orange-flower,
  And dropped her wealth of hair uncrowned,
And I, with tenderest fingers laced
About the slimness of her waist,
Her cool and cream-white throat embraced.

And through this window-pane we glanced
  And saw the silvery soft May-moon,—
Like some young mænad that hath danced
  Till her bright head is in a swoon,—
Lean up against the poplar-tree,
And in the wild wind we could see
The leaves fold round her amorously.

ON VIOL AND FLUTE

They folded round as sisters might
  Around a maiden sick to death,
Whom some perfidious churl and light
  Had cheated with delusive breath:
The moon's white face that golden hour
Had something of the tints that lour
About the aconite in flower.

Yet that last night when Celia died
  The moon's face had a stranger air,
A mien of victory, like a bride,
  Enchanted, resolute and fair:
Through all my sorrow, all my pain,
I gazed upon the orb again,
Till my pent anguish gushed in rain;

And then upon her face I fell,
  My sweet, lost Celia's, and my arms
Clasped round once more the miracle
  Of her divine and tender charms;
The room grew dark, I know not why,—
I gazed and saw that, suddenly,
The moon was ashen in the sky.

Then I arose and left the dead,
  And wandered up into our wood,
Till briar and honeysuckle shed
  A subtle odour where I stood:
And there, beneath the boughs that lie
Thin-leaved against the stars on high,
The moon swam down the liquid sky.

And since that night of pain and love
  I have not felt as others feel,
An alien in their courts I move,
  And from their noisy world I steal;

ON VIOL AND FLUTE

The common ways of life I shun,
And quit my comrades every one,
And live sequestered from the sun.

But when the crescent moon begins
To fill her slender bow with fire,
A dream upon my fancy wins,
I languish with a fond desire;
I stride along the mountain-tops,
But when behind their range she drops,
My heart within me leaps and stops.

But every month one night I lie
Upon the wild back of the hills,
And watch the hollow of the sky
Until the crystal dew distils;
And when the perfect moon appears
A golden paragon of spheres,
I rise a god among my peers.

Twelve times within the weary year
That marvellous hour of joy returns,
And till its rapture reappear
My pulse is like a flame that burns;
I have no wonder, now, nor care
For any woman's hands or hair,
For any face, however fair.

Ah! what am I that she should bend
Her glorious godship down to me?
My mortal weakness cannot lend
Fresh light to her vast deity!
I know not! only this I know—
She loves me, she has willed it so,
And blindly in her light I go.

ON VIOL AND FLUTE

Sweet, make me as a mountain pool
  With thy soft radiance mirrored o'er,
Or like the moon-fern, gray and cool,
  That hides thy virtue in its core;
I must grow old and pass away;
Thou art immortal; love, I pray,
Bend o'er me on my fatal day!

ON VIOL AND FLUTE

WIND OF PROVENCE

O WIND of Provence, subtle wind that blows
Through coverts of the impenetrable rose,
  O musical soft wind, come near to me,
  Come down into these hollows by the sea,
O wind of Provence, heavy with the rose!

How once along the blue sea's battlements
Thy amorous rose-trees poured their spicy scents!
  The heavy perfume streamed down granite walls,
  Where now the prickly cactus gibes and crawls
Down towards cold waves from grim rock-battlements.

Of all the attar, sharp and resinous,
The spines and stalks alone are left for us,
  And so much sickly essence as may cleave
  About the hands of maidens when they weave
Wild roses into wreaths of bloom for us.

Where are the old days vanished, ah! who knows?
When all the wide world blossomed with the rose,
  When all the world was full of frank desire,
  When love was passion and when flowers were
    fire,
Where are the old days vanished, ah! who knows?

Come down, O wind of Provence, sing again
In my lulled ears, for quenching of all pain,
  The litany of endless amorous hours,
  The song of songs that blossomed with the
    flowers,
And brightened when the flowers decayed again.

ON VIOL AND FLUTE

When Ermengarde, the lady of Narbonne,
Star-like above the silken tourney shone,
  With powdered gold upon her ruddy hair;
  There was no woman anywhere so fair
As Ermengarde, the glory of Narbonne!

Love's ladies paced the sward beneath all towers,
Their grass-green satins stirred the daisy-flowers;
  No knight or dame was pale with spent desire,
  For pleasure served them as an altar-fire;
Their mortal spirits faded like soft flowers.

Some wreaths and robes, a lute with moulded strings,
One clear perennial song on deathless wings,
  Still tell us later men of those delights
  That filled their happy days and passionate nights,
While Life smote gaily on his tense harp-strings.

Now cold earth covers all of them with death;
The gray world travels on with failing breath,
  Long having passed her prime, and twilight comes,
  And some men wait for dream-millenniums,
But most are gathering up their robes for death.

The old air hangs about us cold and strange;
We stand like blind men, wistful for a change,
  But only darkness lies on either hand,
  And in a sinister, unlovely land,
We cling together, waiting for the change.

But in this little interval of rest
May one not press the rose-flower to his breast,
  The sanguine rose whose passionate delight
  In amorous days of old was infinite,
And now, like some narcotic, sings of rest?

ON VIOL AND FLUTE

So be it! I, the child of this last age,
To whom the shadow of death is heritage,
  Will set my face to dream against the past;
  This time of tears and trouble cannot last,
The dawn must some time herald a new age.

Till then, O wind of Provence, thrill my brain
With musk and terebinth and dewy rain
  From over-luscious roses, and declare
  That wine is delicate and woman fair;
O wind of Provence, shall I call in vain?

RONDEAU

If Love should faint, and half decline
Below the fit meridian sign,
And shorn of all his golden dress,
His royal state and loveliness,
Be no more worth a heart like thine,
Let not thy nobler passion pine,
But, with a charity divine,
Let Memory ply her soft address
If Love should faint;
And oh! this laggard heart of mine,
Like some halt pilgrim stirred with wine,
Shall ache in pity's dear distress,
Until the balms of thy caress
To work the finished cure combine,
If Love should faint.

MOORLAND

Now the buttercups of May
Twinkle fainter day by day,
  And the stalks of flowering clover
  Make the June fields red all over,—

Now the cuckoo, like a bell,
Modulates a sad farewell,
  And the nightingale, perceiving
  Love's warm tokens, ends her grieving,—

Let us twain arise and go
Where the freshening breezes blow,
  Where the granite giant moulders
  In his circling cairn of boulders!

Just a year ago to-day,
Friend, we climbed the selt-same way,
  Through the village-green, and higher
  Past the smithy's thundering fire;

Up and up and where the hill
Wound us by the cider-still;
  Where the scythers from the meadow
  Sat along the hedge for shadow;

Where the little wayside inn
Signals that the moors begin,
  Ah! remember all our laughter,
  Loitering at the bar,—and after!

ON VIOL AND FLUTE

All must be the same to-day,
All must look the same old way,
  Only that the sweet child-maiden
  We admired so well, fruit-laden,

Now, like an expanded bud,
Must be blown to womanhood,
  And the fuller lips and bosom
  Must proclaim the perfect blossom.

One step more! Before us, lo!
Sheer the great ravine below,
  Empty, save where one brown plover
  Wheels across the ferny cover!

Here, where all the valley lies
Like a scroll before our eyes,
  Let us spend our golden leisure
  In a world of lazy pleasure.

Comrade, let your heart forget
All the thoughts that fray and fret;
  Till the sundown flares out yonder,
  Stretch here in the fern, and ponder.

See, below us, where the stream
Winds with broken silver gleam,
  How the nervous quivering sallows
  Bend and dare not touch the shallows!

In that willow-shaded pool,
When last June the airs were cool,
  How we made the hot noon shiver
  With our plunge into the river!

ON VIOL AND FLUTE

In the sweet sun, side by side,
You and I and none beside!
  Head and hands, thrown backward, slacken,
  Sunk into the soft warm bracken.

Up in heaven a milky sky
Floats across us leisurely;
  When we close our eyes, the duller
  Half-light seems a faint red colour.

In this weary life of ours
Pass too many leaden hours;
  In our chronicles of passion
  Too much apes the world's dull fashion.

If our spirits strive to be
Pure and high in their degree,
  Let us learn the soaring pæan
  Under God's own empyrean.

Leisure in the sun and air
Makes the spirit strong and fair;
  Flaccid veins and pallid features
  Are not fit for sky-born creatures.

Come then, for the hours of May
Wane and falter, day by day,
  And the thrushes' first June chorus
  Will have waked the woods before us.

SUNSHINE BEFORE SUNRISE

The ice-white mountains clustered all around us,
But arctic summer blossomed at our feet;
The perfume of the creeping sallows found us,
The cranberry-flowers were sweet.

The reindeer champed the ghostly moss, and over
The sparkling peak that crowned the dim ravine
The sky was violet-blue; and loved by lover
We clung, and lay half-seen.

Below us through the valley crept a river,
Cleft round an island where the Lap-men lay;
Its sluggish water dragged with slow endeavour
The mountain-snows away.

One thin blue curl of wood-smoke rose up single,—
The only sign of life the valley gave;
But where the fern-roots and the streamlets mingle
Our hearts were warm and brave.

My arm was round her small head sweetly fashioned,
Her bright head shapely as a hyacinth-bell;
So silent were we that our hearts' impassioned
Twin throb was audible.

Alas! for neither knew the language spoken
Amongst the people whence the other came;
A few brief words were all we had for token,
And just each other's name.

ON VIOL AND FLUTE

"My love is pure as this blue heaven above you,"
I said,—but saw she let the meaning slip;
"Jeg elsker Dem," I felt must be, *"I love you!"*
And answered, lip to lip.

Oh! how the tender throbbing of her bosom
Beat, bird-like, crushed to mine in that embrace,
While blushes, like the light through some red blossom,
Dyed all her dewy face.

There is no night-time in the northern summer,
But golden shimmer fills the hours of sleep,
And sunset fades not, till the bright new-comer,
Red sunrise, smites the deep.

But when the blue snow-shadows grew intenser
Across the peaks against the golden sky,
And on the hills the knots of deer grew denser,
And raised their tender cry,

And wandered downward to the Lap-men's dwelling,
We knew our long sweet day was nearly spent,
And slowly, with our hearts within us swelling,
Our homeward steps we bent.

Down rugged paths and torrents mad with foaming,
With clinging hands, we loitered, blind with joy,
I thought a long life spent like this in roaming
Would never tire or cloy.

And very late we saw before us, dreåming,
The red-roofed town where all her days had been,
And far beyond, half shaded and half gleaming,
The blue sea, flecked with green.

ON VIOL AND FLUTE

Ah! sweet is life and sweet is youth's young passion,
And sweet the first kiss on a girl's warm cheek;
Since then we both have learnt in bröken fashion
Each other's tongues to speak;

And many days and nights of love and pleasure
Have laid their fragrant chaplets on our hair,
And many hours of eloquent wise leisure
Have made our lives seem fair;

But Memory knows not where so white a place is
In all her shining catalogue of hours,
As that one day of silent warm embraces
Among the cranberry-flowers.

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SONG

THERE's a sleek thrush sits in the apple-tree
When it blooms all over with rosy snow,
And hark! how he opens his heart to me,
Till its inmost hopes and desires I know!
Blow, wind, blow,
For the thrush will fly when the bloom must go.

O a friend I had, and I loved him well,
And his heart was open and sang to mine,
And it pains me worse than I choose to tell,
That he cares no more if I laugh or pine:
Friend of mine,
Can the music fade out of love like thine!

SESTINA

Fra tutti il primo Arnaldo Daniello
Gran maestro d'amor.—*Petrarch.*

In fair Provence, the land of lute and rose,
Arnaut, great master of the lore of love,
First wrought sestines to win his lady's heart,
Since she was deaf when simpler staves he sang,
And for her sake he broke the bonds of rhyme,
And in this subtler measure hid his woe.

"Harsh be my lines," cried Arnaut, "harsh the woe
My lady, that enthorn'd and cruel rose,
Inflicts on him that made her live in rhyme!"
But through the metre spake the voice of Love,
And like a wild-wood nightingale he sang
Who thought in crabbed lays to ease his heart.

It is not told if her untoward heart
Was melted by her poet's lyric woe,
Or if in vain so amorously he sang;
Perchance through cloud of dark conceits he rose
To nobler heights of philosophic love,
And crowned his later years with sterner rhyme.

This thing alone we know: the triple rhyme
Of him who bared his vast and passionate heart
To all the crossing flames of hate and love,
Wears in the midst of all its storm of woe,—
As some loud morn of March may bear a rose,—
The impress of a song that Arnaut sang.

ON VIOL AND FLUTE

"Smith of his mother-tongue," the Frenchman sang
Of Lancelot and of Galahad, the rhyme
That beat so bloodlike at its core of rose,
It stirred the sweet Francesca's gentle heart
To take that kiss that brought her so much woe
And sealed in fire her martyrdom of love.

And Dante, full of her immortal love,
Stayed his drear song, and softly, fondly sang
As though his voice broke with that weight of woe;
And to this day we think of Arnaut's rhyme
Whenever pity at the labouring heart
On fair Francesca's memory drops the rose.

Ah! sovereign Love, forgive this weaker rhyme!
The men of old who sang were great at heart,
Yet have we too known woe, and worn thy rose.

ON A LUTE FOUND IN A SARCOPHAGUS

To L. A. T.

WHAT curled and scented sun-girls, almond-eyed,
With lotos-blossoms in their hands and hair,
Have made their swarthy lovers call them fair,
With these spent strings, when brutes were deified,
And Memnon in the sunrise sprang and cried,
And love-winds smote Bubastis, and the bare
Black breasts of carven Pasht received the prayer
Of suppliants bearing gifts from far and wide!
This lute has out-sung Egypt; all the lives
Of violent passion, and the vast calm art
That lasts in granite only, all lie dead;
This little bird of song alone survives,
As fresh as when its fluting smote the heart
Last time the brown slave wore it garlanded.

SONGS FROM "KING ERIK" (1876)

I

AUTUMN closes
Round the roses,
Shatters, strips them, head by head;
Winter passes
O'er the grasses,
Turns them yellow, brown and red;
Can a lover
E'er recover
When his summer love is dead?

Yet the swallow
Turns to follow
In the northward wake of spring,
To refashion
Wasted passion
With a sweep of his dark wing,
As returning
Love flies burning
To these stricken lips that sing.

II

I BRING a garland for your head,
Of blossoms fresh and fair,
My own hands wound their white and red
To ring about your hair:
Here is a lily, here a rose,
A warm narcissus that scarce blows,
And fairer blossoms no man knows.

ON VIOL AND FLUTE

So crowned and chapleted with flowers,
  I pray you be not proud;
For after brief and summer hours
  Comes autumn with a shroud;—
Though fragrant as a flower you lie,
You and your garland, by-and-by,
Will fade and wither up and die.

SONGS FROM "THE UNKNOWN LOVER"
(1878)

I

Soft she seems as flowers and dew,
Mild as skies in summer,
But let old love change for new,
She'll wake with the new-comer;
All and each
She will teach
In a froward fashion!
Leopards wild
Fear this child
Roused to fire and passion!

Cease to chide a maid's desire,
Vain your best endeavour;
You'll but waste your threats and ire,
She will heed you never;
You may bind
Storm and wind,
You may curb the ocean,
But in vain
Strive to chain
Woman's mad devotion.

II

Chloë is false, but the fire in her eyes
Rouses her lovers with thousand sweet delusions;
Cælia is true, and, too true to be wise,
Breaks, like a dream, all their amorous illusions.

ON VIOL AND FLUTE

Lovers are weak, and they ask not to know
All that lies under the rose-leaves and the laughter;
Wisdom may call, but to pleasure they go,
Cælia they honour, but Chloë they run after.

WITH A BIRTHDAY GIFT OF WEBSTER'S PLAYS

POET and Friend! Pause while the bells of Time
  Ring out this great division of your days,
  And let the cadence of these sombre plays
Be the grave echo of their silver chime;
And as you slowly up to glory climb,
  Nigh fainting in the lower thorny ways,
  Take solace from the eternal wreath of bays
That crowns at last this weary brow sublime;
His was a soul whose calm intensity
  Glared, shadeless, at the passion-sun that blinds,
    Unblinded, till the storm of song arose;—
Even as the patient and Promethean sea
  Tosses in sleep, until the vulture winds
    Swoop down and tear the breast of its repose.

1869.

EROS

WITHIN a forest, as I strayed
Far down a sombre autumn glade,
I found the god of love;
His bow and arrows cast aside,
His lovely arms extended wide,
A depth of leaves above,
Beneath o'erarching boughs he made
A place for sleep in russet shade.

His lips, more red than any rose,
Were like a flower that overflows
With honey pure and sweet;
And clustering round that holy mouth,
The golden bees in eager drouth
Plied busy wings and feet;
They knew, what every lover knows,
There's no such honey-bloom that blows.

TO DANTE GABRIEL ROSSETTI

MASTER, whose very names have godlike power
  Of song and light divine, being his who went
  Unscathed through blearing fire omnipotent,
Singing for men; and his who hour by hour
Stands in the imminent and splendid shower
  Of God's effulgence; and being lastly blent
  With the warm light and odour effluent
Of your own rhymes, our latest, loveliest dower,
Not in our own land could my weakness mock
  Your strength with homage of my poor May-day,—
    The applause of circling poets scared my song,
But here where twenty thousand thunders shock
  The violent air for leagues of dim sea-way,
    Surely my heart may speak, nor do you wrong!

Outside Bergen Harbour,
Aug. 1871.

TO MY DAUGHTER TERESA

Thou hast the colours of the Spring,
The gold of kingcups triumphing,
The blue of wood-bells wild;
But winter-thoughts thy spirit fill,
And thou art wandering from us still,
Too young to be our child.

Yet have thy fleeting smiles confessed,
Thou dear and much-desirèd guest,
That home is near at last;
Long lost in high mysterious lands,
Close by our door thy spirit stands,
Its journey well-nigh past.

Oh sweet bewildered soul, I watch
The fountains of thine eyes, to catch
New fancies bubbling there,
To feel our common light, and lose
The flush of strange ethereal hues
Too dim for us to share!

Fade, cold immortal lights, and make
This creature human for my sake,
Since I am nought but clay;
An angel is too fine a thing
To sit behind my chair and sing,
And cheer my passing day.

ON VIOL AND FLUTE

I smile, who could not smile, unless
The air of rapt unconsciousness
    Passed, with the fading hours;
I joy in every childish sign
That proves the stranger less divine
    And much more meekly ours.

I smile, as one by night who sees,
Through mist of newly-budded trees,
    The clear Orion set,
And knows that soon the dawn will fly
In fire across the riven sky,
    And gild the woodlands wet.

ALCYONE

SONNET

PHŒBUS

WHAT voice is this that wails above the deep?

ALCYONE

A wife's, that mourns her fate and loveless days.

PHŒBUS

What love lies buried in these waterways?

ALCYONE

A husband's, hurried to eternal sleep.

PHŒBUS

Cease, O beloved, cease to wail and weep.

ALCYONE

Wherefore?

PHŒBUS

The waters in a fiery blaze
Proclaim the godhead of my healing rays.

ALCYONE

No god can sow where fate hath stood to reap.

PHŒBUS

Hold, wringing hands! cease, piteous tears, to fall!

ALCYONE

But grief must rain and glut the passionate sea.

PHŒBUS

Thou shalt forget this ocean and thy wrong,
And I will bless the dead, though past recall.

ALCYONE

What canst thou give to me or him in me?

PHŒBUS

A name in story and a light in song.

VILLANELLE

Little mistress mine, good-bye!
I have been your sparrow true;
Dig my grave, for I must die.

Waste no tear and heave no sigh;
Life should still be blithe for you,
Little mistress mine, good-bye!

In your garden let me lie,
Underneath the pointed yew
Dig my grave, for I must die.

We have loved the quiet sky
With its tender arch of blue;
Little mistress mine, good-bye!

That I still may feel you nigh,
In your virgin bosom, too,
Dig my grave, for I must die.

Let our garden friends that fly
Be the mourners, fit and few.
Little mistress mine, good-bye!
Dig my grave, for I must die.

1870–71

The year that Henri Regnault died,—
The sad red blossoming year of war,—
All nations cast the lyre aside,
And gazed through curvèd fingers far
At horror, waste, and wide.

Not one new song from overseas
Came to us; who had ears to hear?
The kings of Europe's minstrelsies
Walked, bowed, behind the harrowing year,
Veiled, silent, ill at ease.

For us the very name of man
Grew hateful in that mist of blood;
We talked of how new life began
To exiles by the eastern flood,
Flower-girdled in Japan.

We dreamed of new delight begun
In palm-encircled Indian shoals,
Where men are coloured by the sun,
And wear out contemplative souls,
And vanish one by one.

We found no pleasure any more
In all the whirl of Western thought;
The dreams that soothed our souls before
Were burst like bubbles, and we sought
New hopes on a new shore.

ON VIOL AND FLUTE

The men who sang that pain was sweet
Shuddered to see the mask of death
Storm by with myriad thundering feet;
The sudden truth caught up our breath,
Our throats like pulses beat.

The songs of pale emaciate hours,
The fungus-growth of years of peace,
Withered before us like mown flowers;
We found no pleasure more in these,
When bullets fell in showers.

For men whose robes are dashed with blood,
What joy to dream of gorgeous stairs,
Stained with the torturing interlude
That soothed a Sultan's midday prayers,
In old days harsh and rude?

For men whose lips are blanched and white,
With aching wounds and torturing thirst,
What charm in canvas shot with light,
And pale with faces cleft and curst,
Past life and life's delight?

And when the war had passed, and song
Broke out amongst us once again,
As birds sing fresher notes among
The sunshot woodlands after rain,
And happier tones prolong,—

So seemed it with the lyric heart
Of human singers; fresher aims
Sprang in the wilderness of art,
Serener pathos, nobler claims
On man for his best part.

ON VIOL AND FLUTE

The times are changed; not Schumann now,
But Wagner is our music-man,
Whose flutes and trumpets throb and glow
With life, as when the world began
Its genial ebb and flow.

The great god Pan redeified
Comes, his old kingship to reclaim;
New hopes are spreading far and wide;
The lands were purged as with a flame,
The year that Regnault died.

DESIDERIUM

Sit there for ever, dear, and lean
  In marble as in fleeting flesh,
Above the tall gray reeds that screen
  The river when the breeze is fresh;
For ever let the morning light
Stream down that forehead broad and white,
And round that cheek for my delight.

Already that flushed moment grows
  So dark, so distant; through the ranks
Of scented reed the river flows
  Still murmuring to its willowy banks
But we can never hope to share
Again that rapture fond and rare,
Unless you turn immortal there.

There is no other way to hold
  These webs of mingled joy and pain;
Like gossamer their threads enfold
  The journeying heart without a strain,—
Then break, and pass in cloud or dew,
And while the ecstatic soul goes through
Are withered in the parching blue.

Hold, Time, a little while thy glass,
  And, Youth, fold up those peacock wings!
More rapture fills the years that pass
  Than any hope the future brings;
Some for to-morrow rashly pray,
And some desire to hold to-day,
But I am sick for yesterday.

ON VIOL AND FLUTE

Since yesterday the hills were blue
  That shall be gray for evermore,
And the fair sunset was shot through
  With colour never seen before!
Tyrannic Love smiled yesterday,
And lost the terrors of his sway,
But is a god again to-day.

Ah! who will give us back the past?
  Ah! woe, that youth should love to be
Like this swift Thames that speeds so fast,
  And is so fain to find the sea,—
That leaves this maze of shadow and sleep,
These creeks down which blown blossoms creep,
For breakers of the homeless deep.

Then sit for ever, dear, in stone,
  As when you turned with half a smile,
And I will haunt this islet lone,
  And with a dream my tears beguile;
And in my reverie forget
That stars and suns were made to set,
That love grows old, or eyes are wet.

THE SUPPLIANT

Beneath the poplars o'er the sacred pool
The halcyons dart like rays of azure light,—
Fair presage! by the columns white and cool,
I'll watch till fall of night.

Perchance the goddess at the twilight's breath
Will come with silver feet and braidless hair,
And all too startled to decree my death,
Will hearken to my prayer.

So when at moonrise by the farm I go,
The lovely girl who near the fig-tree stands,
May turn no more on scornful feet and slow,
But hold out both her hands.

EPILOGUE

If thou disdain the sacred muse,
Beware lest Nature, past recall,
Indignant at that crime, refuse
Thee entrance to her audience-hall,
Beware lest sea, and sky, and all
That bears reflection of her face
Be blotted with a hueless pall
Of unillumined commonplace.

The moving heavens, in rhythmic time,
Roll, if thou watch them or refrain;
The waves upon the shore in rhyme
Beat, heedless of thy loss or gain;
Not they, but thou, hast lived in vain,
If thou art deaf and blind and dumb,
Parched in the heat of morning rain,
And on the flaming altar numb.

Ah! desolate hour when that shall be,
When dew and sunlight, rain and wind,
Shall seem but trivial things to thee,
Unloved, unheeded, undivined;
Nay, rather let that morning find
Thy molten soul exhaled and gone,
Than in a living death resigned
So darkly still to labour on.

FIRDAUSI IN EXILE

TO AUSTIN DOBSON

Neighbour of the near domain,
Stay awhile your passing wain!
Though to give is more your way,
Take a gift from me to-day!
From my homely store I bring
Signs of my poor husbanding;—
Here a spike of purple phlox,
Here a spicy bunch of stocks,
Mushrooms from my moister fields,
Apples that my orchard yields,—
Nothing,—for the show they make,
Something,—for the donor's sake;
Since for ten years we have been
Best of neighbours ever seen;
We have fronted evil weather,
Nip of critic's frost, together;
We have shared laborious days,
Shared the pleasantness of praise;
Brother not more close to brother,
We have cheered and helped each other;
Till so far the fields of each
Into the other's stretch and reach,
That perchance when both are gone
Neither may be named alone.

June 1885.

FIRDAUSI IN EXILE

I

Now God who flames the buckler of the sun,
And lights that lamp of heaven, the glorious moon,
In the proud breast of Mahmoud had begun
To stir remorse, and, like the loud typhoon,
Shame blew his thoughts in gusts about his soul,
Remembering that old man whose sandy shoon
Pressed the low shores where distant waters roll,
And all his wrongs, and unrequited boon.

II

Since, greatest poet whom the world contains,
Firdausi, on whose tongue the sweet Fársí
Sounded like whispering leafage when it rains,
Who loved the ancient kings, and learned to see
Their buried shapes in vision one by one,
And wove their deeds in lovely minstrelsy,
For all the glory that his name had won
To Persia, was in exile by the sea.

III

In vain through sixty thousand verses clear
He sang of feuds and battles, friend and foe,
Of the frail heart of Kaous, spent with fear,
And Kai Khosrau who vanished in the snow,
And white-haired Zal who won the secret love
Of Rudabeh where water-lilies blow,
And lordliest Rustem, armed by gods above
With every power and virtue mortals know.

IV

In vain these stories of the godlike kings,
Whose bodies were as brass, their hearts as fire,
This verse that centuries with wasting wings
Will never harm, though men with gods conspire—
In vain the good Firdausi, full of years,
Inscribed this treasure to his Shah's desire;
For Mahmoud, heedless of the poet's tears,
Forgot his oath, nor gave the promised hire.

V

For each sonorous verse one piece of gold:
Such was the promise that the Shah had made,
But when the glorious perfect tale was told,
The file of laden elephants delayed;
For Hasan, that black demon, held the ear
Of Mahmoud, and spoke tenderly, and said,
"The end of this old man, my lord, is near;
For gold let silver in the sacks be weighed."

VI

Thereat Firdausi, when it came, was wroth,
And being within the bath, where all might see,
Called the two serving-men, and bid them both
Divide the silver for their service-fee,
And told Ayaz, the false Shah's chamberlain,
"Returning to thy master, say from me,
'Twas not for silver that I toiled amain
And wove my verse for thirty years and three."

VII

Then round him came his friends and bade him fly
From Mahmoud's vengeance, and the murderous sword;
But he, being placable of heart, would try
For peace, since enmity his soul abhorred;

So in the garden where the Shah was used
To breathe the spice that many a rose outpoured,
Firdausi met his master as he mused,
And bowed down at his feet without a word.

VIII

Yet grudging was the pardon, faint the smile,
And when that evening in the mosque he lay,
A veilèd dervish, muttering all the while,
Crept near Firdausi, while he seemed to pray,
And whispered, "Fly from Ghaznin, fly to-night,
The bowstring waits for thee at break of day;
Thou shalt not 'scape because thy beard is white—
Begone!" and like a snake he slipped away.

IX

Then, when of worship there was made an end,
Firdausi rolled his prayer-mat up, and turned
To that bright niche where all believers bend,
And by the light of lamps that round him burned
Wrote on a blue tile with a diamond point
Two couplets that may yet be well discerned,
Though all the mosque be crumbling joint from joint,
By long decay and mouldering age inurned:

X

"The happy court of Mahmoud is a sea,
A sea of endless waves without a coast;
In my unlucky star the fault must be
If I who plunged for pearls in it am lost."
Then to his house he went, weary and sad,
And called around him those who loved him most,
And gave them all the treasure that he had,
Soft silken raiment that a king might boast.

XI

But in a saintly gabardine set out
And crossed the moonlit streets, and left the town,
Nor stopped to hear the lonely owlet shout
His dreamy menace from the turret's crown,
But where the cypresses and myrtles hoar
Hid the white house of Ayaz, stooping down,
He thrust a letter underneath the door,
And faded in the shadow broad and brown.

XII

That letter bade the chamberlain beloved
Before the dawn to seek his master's face,
And plead until his blandishments had moved
The Shah to grant him twenty days of grace;
In twenty days a paper folded fair
Should Ayaz in his master's fingers place,
Which to the gracious Sultan would declare
Firdausi's secret wish, and plead his case.

XIII

The Sultan vowed: but for those twenty days
The Sultan yawned upon his peacock-throne;
The rebeck and the Turkish minstrel's lays
With their sweet treble jarred him to the bone.
All night he tossed in fever, all day long
Far from his blithe hareem he paced alone,
Or scowled to hear the trampling and the song
Where down the cool bazaar the lanterns shone.

XIV

At last, at last the twentieth morning broke,
And Mahmoud, flushed with pleasure, rose and cried
For fair Ayaz, who from his slumber woke,
And brought the sealèd letter, white and wide.

In Allah's name the Sultan broke the seal;
His long-pent wishes satisfied, he sighed,
But reading on, he stared, and seemed to reel,
And crushed the leaf, and gazed out stony-eyed.

XV

It was that scathing satire, writ in fire,
And music such as the red tiger makes
Over a man, the food of her desire,
When she lies down among the crested brakes—
That satire which the world still shudders at,
Whose cadence in the hearer's sense still aches,
At bare recital of whose singing hate
The conscience of forgetful kings awakes.

XVI

"O Mahmoud, of the whole world conqueror,
You fear not me?—fear God!" The Sultan fell
With outstretched arms before the chamber door,
Ashen with rage, and his breast's heave and swell
Was like an earthquake; no word passed his lips,
But curses from the foulest pit of hell,
Till evening brought his soul through that eclipse,
And he rose up, and drank, and feasted well.

XVII

But old Firdausi, bearing eastward still,
Through many a Tartar camp, his woven mat,
At last, one evening, climbed a scarpèd hill
From whence he saw the white roofs of Herat:
Downward he passed, and in a garden, sweet
With roses and narcissus, down he sat,
And wondered if his mountain-weary feet
Might dare to rest where earth was smooth and flat.

XVIII

Then suddenly his tired eyes laughed at last,
For he remembered, by the gift of fate,
Where once he lodged in merry days long past
At Herat, in the arch above the gate.
There Abou'lmaani sold his ancient books,
A man discreet and old, without a mate,
And there Firdausi oft, in dusty nooks,
Had chanted verses till the night was late.

XIX

To Abou'lmaani in the dusk he went,
And found him still more wrinkled than of yore,
An owlish figure, angular and bent,
But hearty still and honest to the core.
So there among the rolls of parchment sere
Once more he drank the mystic Dikhan lore,
But never sought the daylight streets, for fear
Of treachery, and the hatred Mahmoud bore.

XX

And little rest he had, and brief delight,
For rumours from the court at Ghaznin ran,
And with a short farewell he fled by night
Across the mountains to the Caspian;
A gentle Sultan ruled from Astrabad
The jasmine-gardens of Mazinderan,
And to his little court, humble and sad,
One morning came a white-haired minstrel-man.

XXI

Like parrots, one and all, with shrieking tongues
The poets knew their lord, and screamed his name,
Bitter with hate; but his sweet learned songs
Had touched the Sultan with their sacred flame;

He bade the jealous poets all make way,
And did Firdausi honour to their shame,
And asked by what fair accident that day
From stately Ghaznin such a stranger came.

XXII

But when he knew, and heard of Mahmoud's rage,
He trembled, and his fingers stroked his beard;
For scarcely could his pastoral province wage
Safe war with one whom all the nations feared;
So blushing much, as one who loathes his task,
He bade his guest, whom meat and wine had cheered,
To grant the boon that he could scarcely ask
Of one so deeply loved, so long revered.

XXIII

Firdausi rose and sighed, and went his way,
But ere he reached the gate of Astrabad,
The Sultan sent three men in rich array
Laden with gifts, the lordliest that he had,
And camels, that the bard might ride at ease,
And lutes, and a Circassian serving-lad;
So after many days he passed with these
Far down the lordly Tigris to Baghdad.

XXIV

Here underneath the palm-trees, full of shade,
The poet tasted peace, and lingered long;
The Master of the Faithful he obeyed,
And searched the Koran for a theme for song.
The vizier lodged him in his own fair house,
Where wise men gathered in a learned throng,
And when the Khalif heard his pious vows,
He gave him gifts and shielded him from wrong.

XXV

There in a white-walled garden full of trees,
Through which there ran a deep cold water brook
Fringed with white tulips and anemones,
Among the tender grass he wrote the book
Of Yousouf and Zuleika; not one word
Was there of all the windy war that shook
Iran of old, nor was the ear once stirred
With any name the Faithful might rebuke.

XXVI

Nine thousand Persian verses told the tale,
And when the perfect poem was set down,
He rose, and left the plaintive nightingale
That long had tuned her throat to his sweet moan;
Before the Khalif on a broad divan,
To sound of rebecks, in a silken gown,
He sat in state, and when the dance began
Declaimed aloud that song of high renown.

XXVII

Its music sank on well-attempered ears;
The Khalif lounged upon his throne, and cried,
"Lo! I this day am as a man who hears
The angel Gabriel murmur at his side—
And dies not." At the viewless hareem-door
The screen was swayed by bending forms that sighed,
And scheikhs and soldiers, young and old, for more
Still pressed and wished, and scarce would be denied.

XXVIII

Ah, palmy days were those for singer's craft!
  Now every worldling flings his cap in rhyme,
And from an easy bow lets fly a shaft
  At verse much honoured in his grandsire's time;
Now many a ghazel, soft with spices, trips
  Along the alien mouth with frivolous chime,
And lightly rises from unhonoured lips
  The ancient rhythm sonorous and sublime.

XXIX

But great Firdausi met with honour then,
  Garments and jewels, and much store of gold;
Till one, the basest and the worst of men,
  Rode out by stealth that Hasan might be told,
Who, when he heard in Ghaznin that his foe
  Sat, robed and glorious, as he sat of old,
Stirred up with whispers to a fiery glow
  The rage of Mahmoud, which was well-nigh cold.

XXX

So Mahmoud sent to Baghdad embassies
  Demanding speedily Firdausi's head,
Or else the town among her ancient trees
  Must look for instant war, the missive said;
The stately Khalif rose in wrath and pride,
  And swore that till each faithful heart was dead,
His hospitable sword should leave his side,
  And rolling Tigris blush in Persian red.

XXXI

But ere the messengers with garments rent
  Fled back to Ghaznin at the trumpet's blare,
Firdausi to the warlike Khalif sent
  His little servant with the flowing hair,

Who scarcely knowing what he said, by rote
Repeated, "Master, have no thought or care
Of old Firdausi; he can dive and float
A fish in water and a bird in air.

XXXII

"The quail upon the mountain needs no host
To guard her covert in the waving grass;
And though Mahmoud and all his ships be tost
On lake or sea, the little trout will pass.
Stain not thy sword for such a guest as I,
For God, before whose sight man's heart is glass,
Will see the stain that on my soul will lie
If life-blood gush from helmet or cuirass.

XXXIII

"I go my way into the lion's mouth,
And as I journey, God will hold my hand;
Whether I wander north or wander south,
There is no rest for me in any land;
The serpent's fang will find me though I fly
To Frankistan, or Ind, or Samarkand;
I will go home again, for tired am I,
And all too old to wrestle and withstand.

XXXIV

"So send the Persian envoys back in peace,
For, whilst these words are spoken, I am gone;
Though thou shouldst scour the lands and drain the seas,
Thou shalt not find me, since I wend alone;
For all the days that I have loved thee well
My heart is myrrh, that kindles at thy throne,
And I am sadder than my tongue can tell,
That I must leave thee with the end unknown."

XXXV

So with a single camel, clad to sight
Like some poor merchant of the common sort,
Firdausi left the town at morning light,
And passed the gate, and passed the sullen fort,
Unnoted; and his face was to the east,
Towards Hasan and the hateful Persian court,
As if contempt of life were in his breast,
And loathing of his days, so sad and short.

XXXVI

But sure some angel had forewarned him well,
And murmured in his ear the name of "home";
For through this perilous journey there befell
No evil wheresoever he might come;
And Mahmoud guessed not that the foe he sought
Had turned upon his track and ceased to roam,
But sent out scouts, and bade his head be brought
From Bahrein by the vexed Arabian foam.

XXXVII

At last one night, as lone Firdausi rode,
The dawn broke gray across the starry sky,
And far ahead behind the mountains flowed
A sudden gush of molten gold on high;
The glory spread from snowy horn to horn,
Tinged by the rushing dawn with sanguine dye,
And Tous, the little town where he was born,
Flashed at his feet, with white roofs clustered nigh.

XXXVIII

His aged sister fell upon his neck;
His girl, his only child, with happy tears,
Clung to his knees, and sobbing, with no check
Poured out the story of her hopes and fears.

Gravely his servants gave him welcome meet,
And when his coming reached the town-folk's ears
They ran to cluster round him in the street,
And gave him honour for his wealth of years.

XXXIX

And there in peace he waited for the end;
But in all distant lands where Mahmoud sent,
Each Prince and Sultan was Firdausi's friend,
And murmured, like a high-stringed instrument
Swept by harsh fingers, at a quest so rude,
And chid the zeal, austere and violent,
That drove so sweet a voice to solitude,
And bade the Shah consider and relent.

XL

And once from Delhi, that o'erhangs the tide
Of reedy Ganges like a gorgeous cloud,
The Hindu king, with Persia close allied,
Sent letters larger than the faith he vowed,
Smelling of sandalwood and ambergris,
And cited from Firdausi lines that showed
Friendship should be eternal, and the bliss
Of love a gift to make a master proud.

XLI

So while these words were fresh in Mahmoud's brain
He went one night into the mosque to pray,
And by the swinging lamp deciphered plain
The verse Firdausi, ere he fled away,
Wrote on the wall; and one by one there rose
Sad thoughts and sweet of many a vanished day,
When his soul hovered on the measured close
And wave-beat of the rich heroic lay.

XLII

Mourning the verse, he mourned the poet too;
And he who oftentimes had lain awake
Long nights in wide-eyed vision to pursue
His victim, yearning in revengeful ache,
Forgot all dreams of a luxurious death
By trampling elephant or strangling snake,
And thought on his old friend with tightened breath,
And flushed, remorseful for his anger's sake.

XLIII

Back to his court he went, molten at heart,
And all his rage on faithless Hasan turned;
For when he thought him of that tongue's black art,
His wrath was in him like a coal that burned;
He bade his several ministers appear
Before his throne, and by inquiry learned
The cunning treason of the false vizier,
And all his soul's deformity discerned.

XLIV

Hasan was slain that night; and of the gold
His monkey-hands had thieved from rich and poor,
The Sultan bade the money should be told
Long due as payment at Firdausi's door;
But when the sacks of red dinars were full,
Mahmoud bethought him long, and pondered sore,
Since vainly any king is bountiful
Not knowing where to seek his creditor.

XLV

But while he fretted at this ignorance,
A dervish came to Ghaznin, who had seen,
In passing through the streets of Tous, by chance
Firdausi in his garden cool and green;

At this Mahmoud rejoiced, and, with glad eyes
Swimming in tears, quivering with liquid sheen,
Wrote words of pardon, and in welcoming wise
Prayed all might be again as all had been.

XLVI

But while Firdausi brooded on his wrong,
One day he heard a child's clear voice repeat
The bitter jibe of his own scathing song;
Whereat he started, and his full heart beat
Its last deep throb of agony and rage;
And blinded in sharp pain, with tottering feet,
Being very feeble in extremest age,
He fell, and died there in the crowded street.

XLVII

The light of three-and-fourscore summers' suns
Had blanched the silken locks round that vast brow;
If Mahmoud might have looked upon him once,
He would have bowed before him meek and low;
The majesty of death was in his face,
And those wide waxen temples seemed to glow
With morning glory from some holy place
Where angels met him in a burning row.

XLVIII

His work was done; the palaces of kings
Fade in long rains, and in loud earthquakes fall;
The poem that a godlike poet sings
Shines o'er his memory like a brazen wall;
No suns may blast it, and no tempest wreck,
Its periods ring above the trumpet's call,
Wars and the tumult of the sword may shake,
And may eclipse it—it survives them all.

XLIX

Now all this while along the mountain road
The mighty line of camels wound in state;
Shuddering they moved beneath their massy load,
And swinging slowly with the balanced weight
Burden of gold, and garments red as flame,
They bore, not dreaming of the stroke of fate,
And so at last one day to Tous they came
And entered blithely at the eastern gate.

L

But in the thronged and noiseless streets they found
All mute, and marvelled at the tears men shed,
And no one asked them whither they were bound,
And when, for very shame discomfited,
They cried, "Now tell us where Firdausi lies!"
A young man like a cypress rose and said—
The anger burning in his large dark eyes—
"Too late Mahmoud remembers! He is dead!

LI

"Speed! haste away! hie to the western port;
Perchance the convoy has not passed it yet!
But hasten, hasten, for the hour is short,
And your short-memoried master may forget!
Behold, they bear Firdausi to the tomb,
Pour in his open grave your golden debt!
Speed! haste! and with the treasures of the loom
Dry the sad cheeks where filial tears are wet!

LII

"Lead your bright-harnessed camels one by one,
The dead man journeys, and he fain would ride;
Pour out your unctuous perfumes in the sun,
The rose has spilt her petals at his side;

Your citherns and your carven rebecks hold
Here when the nightingale untimely died,
And ye have waited well till he is cold,
Now wrap his body in your tigers' hide."

LIII

And so the young man ceased; but one arose
Of graver aspect, not less sad than he.
"Nay, let," he cried, "the sunshine and the snows
His glittering gold and silk-soft raiment be;
Approach not with unhallowed steps profane
The low white wall, the shadowy lotus-tree;
Nor let a music louder than the rain
Disturb him dreaming through eternity.

LIV

"For him no more the dawn will break in blood,
No more the silver moon bring fear by night;
He starts no longer at a tyrant's mood,
Serene for ever in the Prophet's sight;
The soul of Yaman breathed on him from heaven,
And he is victor in the unequal fight;
To Mahmoud rage and deep remorse are given,
To old Firdausi rest and long delight."

THE CRUISE OF THE "ROVER"

A.D. 1575

I

They sailed away one morning when sowing-time was over,
In long red fields above the sea they left the sleeping wheat;
Twice twenty men of Devonshire who manned their ship the *Rover*,
Below the little busy town where all the schooners meet.

II

Their sweethearts came and waved to them, and filled with noise of laughter
The echoing port below the cliff where thirty craft can ride.
Each lad cried out, "Farewell to thee!" the captain shouted after,
"By God's help we'll be back again before the harvest-tide."

III

They turned the Start and slipped along with speedy wind and weather;
Passed white Terceira's battlements, and, close upon the line,
Ran down a little carrack full of cloth and silk and leather,
And golden Popish images and good Madeira wine.

IV

The crew with tears and curses went tacking back to Flores;
The English forty cut the seas where none before had been,
And spent the sultry purple nights in English songs, and stories
Of England, and her soldiers, and her Spaniard-hating queen.

V

At last the trade-wind caught them, the pale sharks reeled before them,
The little *Rover* shot ahead across the western seas;
All night the larger compass of a tropic sky passed o'er them,
Till they won the Mexique waters through a strait of banyan-trees.

VI

And there good luck befell them, for divers times they sighted
The sails of Spanish merchantmen bound homeward with their wares;
And twice they failed to follow them, and once they stopped benighted;
But thrice the flag of truce flew out, and the scented prize was theirs.

VII

But midsummer was on them, with close-reef gales and thunder,
Their heavy vessel wallowed beneath her weight of gold;

A long highway of ocean kept them and home asunder,
So back they turned towards England with a richly-laden hold.

VIII

But just outside Tampico a man-of-war was riding,
And all the mad young English blood in forty brains awoke,
The *Rover* chased the monster, and swiftly shorewards gliding,
Dipped down beneath the cannonade that o'er her bulwarks broke.

IX

Three several days they fought her, and pressed her till she grounded
On the sandy isle of Carmen, where milky palm-trees grow;
Whereat she waved an ensign, a peaceful trumpet sounded,
And all the Spaniards cried for truce, surrendering in a row.

X

Alas the wiles and jesuitries of scoundrel-hearted Spaniards,
The scarlet woman dyes their hands in deeper red than hers,
For every scrap of white that decked their tackling and their lanyards
Just proved them sly like devils and cowardly like curs.

XI

For out from countless coverts, from low palm-shaded islands,
That fledged in seeming innocence the smooth and shining main,
The pinnaces came gliding and hemmed them round in silence,
All manned with Indian bravos and whiskered dogs of Spain.

XII

Our captain darted forwards, his fair hair streamed behind him,
He shouted in his cheery voice, "For home and for the Queen!"
Three times he waved his gallant sword, but the flashes seemed to blind him,
And a hard look came across his mouth where late a smile had been.

XIII

We levelled with our muskets, and the foremost boat went under,
The ship's boy seized a trumpet and blew a merry blast;
The Spanish rats held off awhile, and gazed at us in wonder,
But the hindmost pushed the foremost on, and boarded us at last.

XIV

They climbed the larboard quarter with their hatchets and their sabres;
The Devon lads shot fast and hard, and sank their second boat,

But the Popish hordes were legion, and Hercules his labours
Are light beside the task to keep a riddled barque afloat.

XV

And twenty men had fallen, and the *Rover's* deck was reeling,
And the brave young captain died in shouting loud "Elizabeth!"
The Spaniards dragged the rest away just while the ship was heeling,
Lest she should sink and rob them of her sailors' tortured breath.

XVI

For they destined them to perish in a slow and cruel slaughter,
A feast for monks and Jesuits too exquisite to lose;
So they caught the English sailors as they leaped into the water,
And a troop of horse as convoy brought them north to Vera Cruz.

XVII

They led them up a sparkling beach of burning sand and coral,
They dragged the brave young Englishmen like hounds within a leash;
They passed beneath an open wood of leaves that smelt of laurel,
Bound close together, each to each, with cords that cut the flesh.

XVIII

And miles and miles along the coast they tramped beneath no cover,
Till in their mouths each rattling tongue was like a hard dry seed,
And ere they came to Vera Cruz when that long day was over,
The coral cut their shoes to rags, and made them wince and bleed.

XIX

Then as they clambered up the town, the jeering crowd grew thicker,
And laughed to see their swollen feet and figures marred and bent,
And women with their hair unloosed stood underneath the flicker
Of torch and swinging lantern, and cursed them as they went.

XX

And three men died of weariness before they reached the prison,
And one fell shrieking with the pain of a poniard in the back,
And when dawn broke in the morning three other souls had risen
To bear the dear Lord witness of the hellish Spaniard pack.

XXI

But the monks girt up their garments, the friars bound their sandals,
They hurried to the market-place with faggots of dry wood,

And the acolytes came singing, with their incense
and their candles,
To offer to their images a sacrifice of blood.

XXII

But they sent the leech to tend them, with his pouch
and his long phial,
And the Jesuits came smiling, with honied words
at first,
For they dared not burn the heretics without some
show of trial,
And the English lads were dying of poisoned air
and thirst.

XXIII

So they gave them draughts of water from a great
cold earthen firkin,
And brought them to the courtyard where the tall
hidalgo sat,
And he looked a gallant fellow in his boots and his
rough jerkin,
With the jewels on his fingers, and the feather in
his hat.

XXIV

And he spoke out like a soldier, for he said, "Ye
caught them fighting,
They met you with the musket, by the musket
they shall fall.
They are Christians in some fashion, and the pile
you're bent on lighting
Shall blaze with none but Indians, or it shall not
blaze at all."

XXV

So they led them to a clearing in the wood outside
the city,
Struck off the gyves that bound them, and freed
each crippled hand,
And dark-eyed women clustered round and murmured
in their pity,
But won no glance nor answer from the steadfast
English band.

XXVI

For their lives rose up before them in crystalline
completeness,
And they lost the flashing soldiery, the sable horde
of Rome,
And the great magnolias round them, with wave on
wave of sweetness,
Seemed just the fresh profusion and hawthorn
lanes of home.

XXVII

They thought about the harvests, and wondered who
would reap them;
They thought about the little port where thirty
craft can ride;
They thought about their sweethearts, and prayed
the Lord to keep them;
Then kissed each other silently, and hand in hand
they died.

A BALLAD OF THE UPPER THAMES

I

Ah! what a storm of wind and hail!
Another quart of Witney ale,
We'll test the cellar's mettle,
And Emma, of her work deprived,—
Our Hebe at the "Rose Revived,"—
Shall serve us in the settle.

II

The mowers from the field shall stray,
The fisher from the lonely bay
Shall leave his pool forlorner,
The snooded, shy dock-gatherers too
Shall lift their skirts of dusky blue,
And line the chimney-corner.

III

And through the gusts of whirling rain
The cuckoo's voice may call in vain
From boughs and steaming thickets;
We'll listen to the jerking crock,
The ticking of the eight-day clock,
The chirping of the crickets.

IV

Until some topic, lightly sprung,
Unloose the timid rustic tongue
To news of crops or weather,
And men and women, touched to speech,
Respond and babble, each to each,
Till all discourse together.

V

Until the wonted ale-house chat
With knotty points of this and that,
And heat of Whig and Tory,
Resolve into the single stream
Of one old man's disjointed theme,
An ancient country story.

VI

I sit and watch from out the pane
The silvery Windrush through the rain
Haste down to join the Isis,
Half listening to the simple tale
That winds along, thro' draughts of ale,
On to its measured crisis.

VII

Or watch the head of him who tells
These long-drawn rural miracles,—
His worn old cheek that flushes,
His eye that darts above his pipe
Keen as the flashing of a snipe
Through beds of windless rushes.

VIII

He tells,—for this was long ago,
The winter of the heavy snow,
And none but he remembers,—
What fate in love to George befell,
The keeper up at Stanlake Well,—
Then stirs the fragrant embers,

IX

Then starts anew :—" When I was young
More champion Berkshire men were flung
By George in wrestling matches,
Than sacks of wheat could stand a-row
Inside yon shed, or martens go
To build within these thatches.

X

His back was like a three-year ash,
His eye had got the steady flash
That's death to hare or pheasant ;
And when he walked the woods at night
The tramps would take to sudden flight,—
To meet him was not pleasant.

XI

But still he held himself aloof
From every friendly neighbour's roof,
Nor chatted in the village ;
The farmers called him proud, for he
Could little in their children see
But imps brought up to pillage.

XII

At harvest-home and country dance
He gave the beauties just a glance,
The calmest of beholders ;
The lasses failed his pulse to move ;
Then suddenly he fell in love
Right over head and shoulders.

XIII

He went to buy a dog one day
At Inglesham, and on the way
A sudden snowstorm caught him ;

His path he lost; at length a lane
Down which the north wind swept amain
Straight into Lechlade brought him.

XIV

Within the parlour of the inn,
Snug from the driving frost and din,
He sipped his gin-and-water,
When like a well-tuned instrument,
Close by him, singing, Mary went,
The landlord's rosy daughter.

XV

Her voice, before he caught her face,
Bewitched him with its joyous grace,
But when he saw her features,
Like any running hare shot dead
His heart leapt suddenly, and his head
Was like a swooning creature's.

XVI

He rose and stood, or tried to stand,
He clutched the table with his hand,
Until she went out, singing;
Then, sitting down, and calm again,
He felt a kind of quiet pain
Thro' all his pulses ringing.

XVII

At first he scarcely knew that this
Strange ache made up of grief and bliss
Was love, his fancy thronging;
For Mary's image night and day
From his tired eyelids would not stray,
But wore him out with longing.

XVIII

And all that winter and that spring
The very least excuse would bring
His steps to Mary's presence;
He'd sit for hours and try to smile,
Yet look as grim and dark the while
As any judge at sessions.

XIX

But Mary with her cheerful eyes,
Like hearts-ease where a dewdrop lies,
And lips like warm carnations,
Laughed, bridling up her sunny head,
When jokes and sly remarks were made
By neighbours and relations.

XX

So things went on till limes in June
Dropped honey-dust, and all in tune
The elm-trees rang with thrushes;
'Tis sweet, when, fed by showers of May,
Through lily-leaves and flowers that sway,
The brimming river flushes.

XXI

The town one evening seemed to keep
A quiet sort of twilight sleep,
Hushed, scented, calm and airy;
And George, who rode across from far,
Found no one sitting in the bar
But smiling Mistress Mary.

XXII

Long time he sat and nothing said,
But listened to the chatting maid,
Who loved this evening leisure;

It was so dreamy there and sweet,
And she so bright from head to feet,
He could have wept for pleasure.

XXIII

His beating heart, that leaped apace,
Took comfort from her smiling face
That pertly seemed to brave you :—
'If you don't mind a keeper's life,
I wish you'd come and be my wife,
For no man else shall have you.'

XXIV

She started, turned first white, then red,
And for a minute nothing said,
Then seemed to search and find him ;
'Good-night,' she answered, short and straight,
'I had no notion 'twas so late,'
And shut the door behind him.

XXV

The threshold pebbles seemed to scorch
His feet ; he leaned against the porch,
And tore the honeysuckle ;
Up to the window-pots he sighed,—
Then from one casement, opened wide,
He heard a kind of chuckle.

XXVI

So, mad with love and sick with rage,
He swore his passion to assuage,
And by his death abash her ;
He ran three miles from Lechlade town,
Then threw his hat and cudgel down,
And plunged in Kelmscott lasher.

XXVII

The moon on Eaton Hastings Wood
Turned white, as any full moon should,
To see a drowning keeper,
And twice he sank, and twice came out,
But as the eddies whirled about,
Each time he sank the deeper.

XXVIII

Now Mary's brother kept the weir,—
A merry lad, a judge of beer,
And stout for twenty-seven;—
It chanced that night he smoked at ease
Among his stocks and picotees
Beneath the summer heaven.

XXIX

He dashed across the seething din,
Thrust all the piles and rimers in,
And stopped the weir's mad riot;
Then rushing to the reedy strand
Swam out, and safely dragged to land,
Poor George, now white and quiet.

XXX

Long time before the doors of death
The little fluttering of his breath
Seemed taking leave for ever;
His pulse was gone, his cheek was blue,—
But by degrees they brought him to,
And bore him from the river.

XXXI

Now when next day the news went down
The streets and lanes of Lechlade town,
It brought much consternation;

And as the tale the gossips shared
They duly one and all declared
The death a dispensation.

XXXII

How fortunate he showed in time
His selfish aptitude for crime,
His passions thus revealing!
Much ill of the deceased was said;
But when they knew he was not dead,
A change came o'er the feeling.

XXXIII

Then Mary, who had sobbed and cried,
Grew confident and laughing-eyed,
While all the town grew graver;
She warbled like a happy bird,
Nor ever made as though she heard
The names the neighbours gave her.

XXXIV

For now they all agreed that she
Was much more criminal than he,
Was pert, and stony-hearted,
That on her head his blood would lie,
Since he was almost sure to die,
From this cold hussy parted.

XXXV

But still she warbled; till one day
When every neighbour had her say
And each spoke somewhat louder,
She stood right up behind the bar,
For all to hear her near or far,
Nor could a queen look prouder.

XXXVI

'If any one that's here to-day
Is going over Stanlake-way,
I'd have him know for certain,
It's not the way to win a wife,
To hang around, and plague her life,
And peep behind the curtain.

XXXVII

'Nor after loafing half-a-year,
And blushing when he calls for beer,
To shout the question at her,
When mother's lying ill in bed,
Awake, and listening overhead,
And wondering what's the matter.

XXXVIII

'Men stalk a girl as with a gun,
And if she turns and tries to run,—
Their patience all abated,—
They rush and drown themselves for spite,
To punish people whom they might
Have won, had they but waited.

XXXIX

'My brother should have left him there,
Since plainly all his load of care
Is more than he can carry;
In future he may wooing go
To Witney or—to Jericho,—
But me he'll never marry.'

XL

The neighbours all were sadly shocked;
The maiden at their scruples mocked,
As through her work she hurried;

She sang aloud; and yet 'tis said,
That afternoon her eyes were red,
Her temper crossed and flurried.

XLI

But out, alas! for maidens' oaths!
When Love puts on his Sunday-clothes
In vain their hearts are chary;
Before three months had gone about
The Lechlade bells were pealing out,
And George was marrying Mary.

XLII

They bought the 'Starling and the Thrush'
Just out of Bampton-in-the-Bush,
And long they lived together;
For many a cheerful day they throve
Contented in each other's love,
Through sun and stormy weather.

XLIII

In Bampton Churchyard now they lie,
Their grave is open to the sky,
No tombstone weighs above them,
But pinks and pansies in a row,
And mignonette, and myrtle show
That still their children love them."

XLIV

The old man, sipping at his ale,
Wound up the ending of his tale,
As dryly as he started,
Shook out the ashes from his pipe,
Then gave his old thin lips a wipe,
And rose, and slow departed.

XLV

For, lightened of their load of rain,
The great loose clouds, grown white again,
Down in the west were blending;
While high o'erhead the sun rode through
A radiant plain of sparkling blue,
His noonday throne ascending.

XLVI

The Windrush beamed, like polished steel;
The lark, in mounting, seemed to reel
With airs too sweet to utter;
The roses shook their laden leaves,
The martins underneath the eaves
Began to peep and flutter.

XLVII

And so, dissolving in the sun,
Our rustic synod, one by one,
Stole out to workday labour;
The fisher found his lines and bait,
Nor would the brown haymakers wait
To pledge the chattiest neighbour.

XLVIII

The women rose, among the fields
To reap what the rank margin yields,
Tall seeded docks that shiver;
We, loth to leave the "Rose Revived,"
Went last, although we first arrived,
Down to the brimming river.

THE CHARCOAL-BURNER

He lives within the hollow wood,
From one clear dell he seldom ranges;
His daily toil in solitude
Revolves, but never changes.

A still old man, with grizzled beard,
Gray eye, bent shape, and smoke-tanned features,
His quiet footstep is not feared
By shyest woodland creatures.

I love to watch the pale blue spire
His scented labour builds above it;
I track the woodland by his fire,
And, seen afar, I love it.

It seems among the serious trees
The emblem of a living pleasure,
It animates the silences
As with a tuneful measure.

And dream not that such humdrum ways
Fold naught of Nature's charm around him;
The mystery of soundless days
Hath sought for him and found him.

He hides within his simple brain
An instinct innocent and holy,
The music of a wood-bird's strain,—
Not blithe, nor melancholy,

THE CHARCOAL-BURNER

But hung upon the calm content
  Of wholesome leaf and bough and blossom—
An unecstatic ravishment
  Born in a rustic bosom.

He knows the moods of forest things,
  He holds, in his own speechless fashion,
For helpless forms of fur and wings
  A mild paternal passion.

Within his horny hand he holds
  The warm brood of the ruddy squirrel;
Their bushy mother storms and scolds,
  But knows no sense of peril.

The dormouse shares his crumb of cheese,
  His homeward trudge the rabbits follow;
He finds, in angles of the trees,
  The cup-nest of the swallow.

And through this sympathy, perchance,
  The beating heart of life he reaches
Far more than we who idly dance
  An hour beneath the beeches.

Our science and our empty pride,
  Our busy dream of introspection,
To God seem vain and poor beside
  This dumb, sincere reflection.

Yet he will die unsought, unknown,
  A nameless headstone stand above him,
And the vast woodland, vague and lone,
  Be all that's left to love him.

THE DEATH OF ARNKEL

Across the roaring board in Helgafell,
Above the clash of ringing horns of ale,
The guests of Snorri, reddened with the frost,
Weighed all their comrades through a winter night,
Disputing which was first in thew and brain
And courteous acts of manhood; some averred
Their host, the shifty Snorri, first of men,
While some were bent to Arnkel, some to Styrr.
Then Thorleif Kimbi shouted down the hall,
"Folly and windy talk! the stalwart limbs
Of Styrr, and that sharp goodly face of thine,
All-cunning Snorri, make one man, not twain,—
One man in friendship and in rede, not twain,—
Nor that man worthy to be named for skill,
Or strength, or beauty, or for popular arts,
With Arnkel, son of Thorolf the grim ghost.
Wit has he, though not lacking therewithal
In sinew; see to it, comrades, lest he crush
The savage leaders of our oligarchy,
Vast, indolent, mere iron masks of men,
Unfit for civic uses; his the hand
To gather all our forces like the reins
Of patient steeds, and drive us at his will,
Unless we stir betimes, and are his bane."

So from his turbulent mouth the shaft struck home,
Venomed with envy and the jealous pride
Of birth; and ere they roared themselves to rest,
The chieftains vowed that Arnkel must be slain,
Nor waited many days; for one clear night
Freystein, the spy, as near his sheep he watched,
Saw Arnkel fetching hay from Orlygstad,

THE DEATH OF ARNKEL

With three young thralls of his own household folk,
And left the fold, and crept across the fell,
And wakened from their first sweet midnight sleep
The sons of Thorbrand, and went on, and roused
Snorri, who dreamed of blood and dear revenge.
Then through the frosty moonlit night they sped,
Warmed to the heart with hopes of murderous play,
Nine men from Snorri's house; and by the sea
At Alptafjord they met the six men armed
With Thorleif; scarcely greeted they, but skimmed
Along the black shore of the flashing fjord,
Lit by the large moon in a cloudless sky;
Over the swelling, waving ice they flew,
Grinding the tufts of grass beneath their sleighs,
So silent, that the twigs of juniper
Snapped under them, sharp, like a cracking whip,
Echoing, and so to Orlygstad they came.
But Arnkel saw them through the cold bright air,
And turned, and bade the three young thralls haste home,
To bring back others of their kith to fight;
So, maddened by base fear, they rushed, and one
Or ever he neared the homestead, as he fled,
Slipped on the forehead of a mountain-force,
And volleying down from icy plane to plane,
Woke all the echoes of that waterfall,
And died, while numb with fright the others ran.

But Arnkel bowed, and loosened from his sleigh
The iron runner with its shining point,
And leaped upon the fence, and set his back
Against the haystack; through the frosty night
Its warm deep odour passed into his brain.
But Snorri and his fellows with no word
Sprang from their sleighs, and met below the fence,

And reaching upwards with their brawny arms,
Smote hard at Arnkel. With the runner he,
Cleaving with both hands, parried blow on blow,
Till, shaft by shaft, their spears splintered and
snapt;
Nor would they yet have reached him, but that he,
Gathering a mighty stroke at Thorleif's head,
Dashed down his runner on the icy fence
And shivered it, while backwards Thorleif fell,
Bending the slimness of his supple loins,
Unwounded. So a moment's space they stood
Silent. Then from the haystack at his back
His glittering sword and buckler Arnkel seized,
And like a wild-cat clomb the stack, and stood
Thigh-deep astride upon the quivering hay,
Raining down thrusts and blinding all his foes
With moony lightnings from the flashing steel.
But Thorleif clambered up behind his back;
And Snorri, with his shield before his face,
Harried him through the wavering veil of hay;
And Styrr, like some great monster of the fells,
Swayed his huge broadsword in his knotted fists,
And swept it, singing, through the helm and
brain,
And deep sank Arnkel on the bloody stack.

They wrapped his corse in hay, and left him there;
To whom within the silence of the night
Came that dark ghost, his father, whose black face
Affrights the maidens in the milking-stead;
And till afar along the frozen road
The tinkling of the sleighs he heard, and knew
That, all too late, the thralls of Arnkel came,
He hung above the body of his son,
Casting no shadow in the dazzling moon,

THE DEATH OF ARNKEL

Cursing the gods with inarticulate voice,
And cursing that too-envious mood of men
That brooks no towering excellence, nor heeds
Virtue, nor welfare of th' unsceptred state.

AN EPISTLE TO DR. OLIVER WENDELL HOLMES

ON HIS SEVENTY-FIFTH BIRTHDAY,
AUGUST 29, 1884

SIR,
As Age by Age, thro' fell Enchantment bound,
The Heroe of some antient Myth is found,
Wild Rocks about him, at the fierce Sea's Brim,
And all his World an Old-Wives' Tale but him,
His Garments, cast upon th' inclement Shoar,
Such as long since our Grandsires' Grandsires wore,
While all his Gestures and his Speech proclaim
Him great Revealer of forgotten Fame,—
Such, Oh! Musician, dost thou seem to be
To us who con th' Augustan Age by thee,
Who hearken to thy Verse, to learn thro' it
How DRYDEN to illustrious ORMOND writ,
Or in thy fil'd and polisht Numbers hope
To catch the Secret of the Art of POPE;
Ah! subtil Skill! Ah! Bard of dying Fires,
Let us but lose thee, and a Race expires;
So long as thou dost keep this Treasure thine
Great ANNA's Galaxy has Leave to shine.
Thou who do'st link us with that elder Day
When either QUEENSBERRY made Court to GAY,
Thro' all the Thunders of romantick Times,
Thro' Reefs of monstrous Quips and Shoals of Rhimes,
We've steer'd at last, and, like Ships long at Sea,
Our Latest-Born sail home to Grace and thee;
Home-ward they sail, and find the World they left
Of all but thee, yet not of thee bereft;
Still in thy pointed Wit their Souls explore
Familiar Fields where CONGREVE rul'd before;

Still in thy human Tenderness they feel
The honest Voice and beating Heart of STEELE.
  Long be it so; may Sheaf be laid on Sheaf
Ere thy live Garland puts forth its *Last Leaf;*
As in old Prints, long may we see, in Air,
Thy *Guardian Angel* hover o'er thy Hair;
Still may the *Table,* where our Fathers sat
To eat of Manna, hold its *Autocrat;*
Since surely none of all the Blest can be
Home-sick in Heav'n, as we on Earth, for thee.
  And Oh! whil'st o'er th' embattl'd Crags afar
Thy practis'd Eyes gaze down the Gorge of War,
Where thro' the blinding Dust and Heat we fight
Against the Brazen-Helm'd Amalekite,
At Height of Noon, Oh! lift up both those Hands
To urge new Virtue thro' our fainting Bands,
And when we feel our Sinews nerv'd to strike
Envy and Errour, Shame and Sloth, a-like,
We'll say 'tis well that, while we battle thus,
Our MOSES stands on high 'twixt Heav'n and us.

SIR,
Your Most Humble, Most Obedient Servant,
EDMUND GOSSE.

APRIL ONCE MORE

The sorrel lifts her snow-white bloom
From green leaves soft and sour,
The wryneck bids the cuckoo come,
The wych-elm's all in flower;
That tweet! tweet! tweet! that dusty dew,
That white star at my feet,
They speak of Aprils past—and you,
My sweet!

Our wood still curves against the sky,
And still, all stark and dim,
Our hornbeam's fluted branches lie
Along the shining rim;
But ah! within its base of moss
The rabbits leap and peer,
No footsteps fright them as they cross—
This year.

When winter shared my hapless plight,
I bound my heart in frost;
There was no wealth to vex my sight
With treasure it had lost;
But oh! the buds, the scent, the song,
The agonising blue—
They teach my hopeless heart to long
For you!

THE CHURCH BY THE SEA

THAT spirit of wit, whose quenchless ray
To wakening England Holland lent,
In whose frail wasted body lay
The orient and the occident,

Still wandering in the night of time,
Nor yet conceiving dawn should be,
A pilgrim with a gift of rhyme,
Sought out Our Lady by the Sea.

Along the desolate downs he rode,
And pondered on God's mystic name,
Till with his beads and votive ode,
To Walsingham Erasmus came.

He found the famous chapel there,
Unswept, unlatticed, undivine,
And the bleak gusts of autumn air
Blew sand across the holy shrine.

Two tapers in a spicy mist
Scarce lit the jewelled heaps of gold
As pilgrim after pilgrim kissed
The relics that were bought and sold.

A greedy Canon still beguiled
The wealthy at his wicket-gate,
And o'er his shining tonsure smiled
A Virgin doubly desecrate.

The pattered prayers, the incense swung,
  The embroidered throne, the golden stall,
The precious gifts at random flung,—
  And North Sea sand across it all!

He mocked, that spirit of matchless wit;
  He mourned the rite that warps and seres:
And seeing no hope of health in it,
  He laughed lest he should break in tears.

And we, if still our reverend fanes
  Lie open to the salt-sea deep,
If flying sand our choir profanes,
  Shall we not laugh, shall we not weep?

We toll the bell, we throng the aisle,
  We pay a wealth in tithe and fee,
We wreathe the shrine, and all the while
  Our Church lies open to the sea.

The brackish wind that stirs the flame,
  And fans the painted saints asleep,
From heaven above it never came,
  But from the starless Eastern deep.

The storm is rising o'er the sea,
  The long bleak windward line is grey,
And when it rises, how shall we
  And our weak tapers fare that day?

Perchance amid the roar and crack
  Of starting beams we yet shall stand
Perchance our idols shall not lack
  Deep burial in the shifting sand.

GILEAD

And I will bring them into the land of Gilead.

Oh, who will take my hand and let mine eyes have rest,
And lead me like a child into the quiet west,
Until beneath my feet I press the short wild grass,
And feel the wind come shorewards down the granite pass;
So, fashioned darkly round the mirror of the mind,
The solemn forms I loved in infancy to find
Bent down to shut me in, in billowy solitude,—
Harsh tor and quaking sedge and devil-haunted wood,—
Behind the thin pink lids I should not dare to raise,
Would gather and console the turmoil of my days?

A grain of balm has lain within my scentless breast
Through all these roaring years of tempest,—and shall rest,
A single grain, how sweet! then, ah! what perfumes rise,
Where, bathed by sacred dews, the soul's full Gilead lies!

There, with the sands around, and many a mirage faint
To tempt the faded sight of fakir and of saint,
Cool, with their clump of palms, by wells like crystal pure,
The myrrh-trees of the Lord, the dripping boughs endure.

Oh, lead me by the hand, and I with eyelids close
Will hear the wind that sighs, the bubbling stream that flows,

The shrill Arabian sounds of blessed aged men,
And the low cries of weary souls at home again;

Yet never raise my lids, lest all these Eastern things,
These forms of alien garb, these palm-surrounded springs,
Surprise my brain that grew in colder zones of light,
Betray with homeless home my impulse of delight.

But when I think I feel the west wind, not the east,
From drought and chilly blue by soft gray airs released,
I'll bend my hand and touch the country at my feet,
And find the sun-dew there, and moor-ferns coarse and sweet,
And the rough bilberry-leaves, and feel the mountain-moss
Stretch warm along the rock, and cross it, and re-cross.

What we loved first and lost in Nature, yet retain
In memory, prized the most, worn to a single grain,
That scene, though wild and far, and acrid with the sea,
Pilgrim of life, is still Gilead to thee and me;
And there where never yet to break the shadows come
Battalions of the world, with bedlam fife and drum,
There, in the ancient hush, the elfin spirit of sleep
Preserves for child-like hearts a pillow broad and deep,
And in a tender twilight, mystic and divine,
The homely scenes we loved take hues of Palestine.

DE ROSIS HIBERNIS

Ambitious Nile, thy banks deplore
  Their Flavian patron's deep decay;
Thy Memphic pilot laughs no more
  To see the flower-boat float away;
Thy winter-roses once were twined
  Across the gala-streets of Rome,
And thou, like Omphale, couldst bind
  The vanquished victor in his home.

But if the barge that brought thy store
  Had foundered in the Libyan deep,
It had not slain thy glory more,
  Nor plunged thy rose in salter sleep;
Nor gods nor Cæsars wait thee now,
  No jealous Pæstum dreads thy spring,
Thy flower enfolds no augur's brow,
  Nor gives a poet strength to sing.

Yet, surely, when the winds are low,
  And heaven is all alive with stars,
Thy conscious roses still must glow
  Above thy dreaming nenuphars;
They recollect their high estate,
  The Roman honours they have known,
And while they ponder Cæsar's fate
  They cease to marvel at their own.

WINTER GREEN

To-day the winter woods are wet,
And chill with airs that miss the sun
The autumn of the year is done,
Its leaves all fallen, its flower-stars set,
Its frosty hours begun.

Should last year's gold narcissus yearn
For next year's roses, oh ! how vain !
No brief dead blossoms rise again,
But each sweet little life in turn
Must shoot and bloom and wane.

Dear, had the years that slip so fast,
Brought you too soon, or me too late,
How had we gnashed our teeth at fate,
And wandered to our grave at last
Forlorn, disconsolate !

Surely, before the stars were sure,
Before the moon was fixed in heaven,
Your unborn soul to mine was given,
Your clean white spirit, rare and pure,
For me was shaped and shriven.

Ah ! surely no time ever was
When we were not ; and our souls' light
Made those cold spaces infinite
That lie between the years like glass,
Seen only in God's sight !

Howe'er it be, my one desire,
If chance hath brought us face to face,
Or if the scheme of things found place
To store our twin hearts' light and fire
In strange foreseeing grace,—

Howe'er it be, for us at least
The woodland-pathways are not dark,
New lights are on the boughs and bark,
And in the sunless rainshot east
We hear a mounting lark!

THEOCRITUS

For A. Lang's Translation

The poplars and the ancient elms
  Make murmurous noises high in air;
The noonday sunlight overwhelms
  The brown cicalas basking there;
But here the shade is deep, and sweet
  With new-mown grass and lentisk-shoots,
And far away the shepherds meet
    With noisy fifes and flutes.

Their clamour dies upon the ear;
  So now bring forth the rolls of song,
Mouth the rich cadences, nor fear
  Your voice may do the poet wrong;
Lift up the chalice to our lips,—
  Yet see, before we venture thus,
A stream of red libation drips
    To great Theocritus.

We are in Sicily to-day;
  And, as the honied metre flows,
Battos and Corydon, at play,
  Will lose the syrinx, gain the rose;
Soft Amaryllis, too, will bind
  Dark violets round her shining hair,
And in the fountain laugh to find
    Her sun-browned face so fair.

We are in Sicily to-day;
  Ah! foolish world, too sadly wise,
Why didst thou e'er let fade away
  Those ancient, innocent ecstasies?

Along the glens, in chequered flight,
Hither to-day the nymphs shall flee,
And Pan forsake for our delight
The tomb of Helice.

SUNSHINE IN MARCH

WHERE are you, Sylvia, where?
For our own bird, the woodpecker, is here,
Calling on you with cheerful tappings loud!
The breathing heavens are full of liquid light;
The dew is on the meadow like a cloud;
The earth is moving in her green delight—
Her spiritual crocuses shoot through,
And rathe hepaticas in rose and blue;
But snowdrops that awaited you so long
Died at the thrush's song.

"Adieu, adieu!" they said.
"We saw the skirts of glory, and we fade;
We were the hopeless lovers of the Spring,
Too young, as yet, for any love of ours;
She is harsh, not having heard the white-throat sing
She is cold, not knowing the tender April showers;
Yet have we felt her, as the buried grain
May feel the rustle of the unfallen rain;
We have known her, as the star that sets too soon
Bows to the unseen moon."

HENRY PATMORE

This virgin soul looked shyly forth, and knew
The fiery face of Love, and then withdrew,
Just when the spices through its garden blew.

With this one glimpse so full a rapture came,
It shrank from earthly joy as pain and shame,
And passed to God on that first mystic flame.

Dissolved, assumed in ardours so intense,
It rose to heights untouched by mortal sense,
Like some pure cloud of molten frankincense.

And that pale lamp of verse, which God had given
To guide this soul, while o'er life's ocean driven,
Was quenched within the blazing glow of heaven.

INSCRIPTION FOR A FOUNTAIN

Deep in the heart of this dim wood
Our Naiad pours her slender urn,
Nor dreams that round its gathering flood
The fortunes of a world will turn.

WITH A COPY OF HERRICK

FRESH with all airs of woodland brooks
And scents of showers,
Take to your haunt of holy books
This saint of flowers.

When meadows burn with budding May,
And heaven is blue,
Before his shrine our prayers we say,—
Saint Robin true.

Love crowned with thorns is on his staff,—
Thorns of sweet-briar;
His benediction is a laugh,
Birds are his choir.

His sacred robe of white and red
Unction distils;
He hath a nimbus round his head
Of daffodils.

A WASTED AFTERNOON IN SUTHERLAND

Ah! what an azure day!
Beneath the granite gray
The sulky ferox lay
And waved a fin;
Above his surly head
The amber river sped,
Shrunk in its summer bed,
Limpid and thin.

We heard the eddies lisp;
Deep in the heather crisp
We lay to watch Canisp
And Suilven blue;
Between their crags, behold,
A sheet of polished gold,
Where Fewn drew fold by fold
Her waters through.

"Hopeless the gray fly's wiles!
Our dusky ferox smiles;
We have trudged for miles and miles
In vain, in vain;
Better the storm that fills
The thunder-coloured rills,
Better the shrouded hills
And drifts of rain!"

But "No! ah! no!" I cried;
"This lovely mountain-side,
In faintest purple dyed
And golden gray,

Will live in vision still
When nerves forget to thrill,
When hands have lost the skill
To play and slay!"

But still he watched the sky
With discontented eye,
For never a cloud was nigh,
Nor stormy flag;
Noon fell to afternoon,
Till, like a change of tune,
The delicate virgin moon
Stepped from the crag.

So, through that sleepy weather,
Our rods and we together
Lay on the springing heather,
Assuaged at last,
And now, through memory's haze,
Best of our fishing days
Seems just that cloudless blaze,
With never a cast.

SONNETS AND QUATORZAINS

SONNETS AND QUATORZAINS

ON DARTMOOR

To J. A. B.

I

Warm tissue of refulgent vapour fills
The valley southward to the hurrying stream,
Whose withered and sun-wasted waters gleam
Meandering downwards through the terraced hills;
Here, even here, the hand of man fulfils
Its daily toil, for though alone I seem
I hear the clangour of a far-off team,
And men that shout above the shouting rills;
Nor jars this noise of labour on mine ear,
Nor seem, because of these, the spirits less near
That animate the mountains and the skies;
The self-same heart of Nature shineth clear
Through filmy garments of a golden sphere
And earnest looks of humble human eyes.

II

A soft gray line of haze subdues the west
That was so rosy half an hour ago;
The moaning night-breeze just begins to blow,
And now the team that ploughed the mountain's breast
Cease their long toil, and dream of home and rest;
Now, giant-like, the tall young ploughmen go
Between me and the sunset, footing slow;
My spirit, as an uninvited guest,
Goes with them, wondering what desire, what aim,
May stir their hearts and mine with common flame,
Or, thoughtless, do their hands suffice their soul?
I know not, care not, for I deem no shame
To hold men, flowers, and trees, and stars the same,
Myself, as these, one atom in the whole.

THE TOMB OF SOPHOCLES

A BOUNDING satyr, golden in the beard,
  That leaps with goat-feet high into the air,
  And crushes from the thyme an odour rare,
Keeps watch around the marble tomb revered
Of Sophocles, the poet loved and feared,
  Whose sovereign voice once called out of her lair
  The Dorian muse severe, with braided hair,
Who loved the thyrsus and wild dances weird.
Here all day long the pious bees can pour
  Libations of their honey; round this tomb
  The Dionysiac ivy loves to roam:
The satyr laughs; but He awakes no more,
Wrapped up in silence at the grave's cold core,
  Nor sees the sun wheel round in the white dome.

PERFUME

WHAT gift for passionate lovers shall we find?
  Not flowers nor books of verse suffice for me,
  But splinters of the odorous cedar-tree,
And tufts of pine-buds, oozy in the wind;
Give me young shoots of aromatic rind,
  Or samphire, redolent of sand and sea,
  For all such fragrances I deem to be
Fit with my sharp desires to be combined.
My heart is like a poet, whose one room,
  Scented with Latakia faint and fine,
  Dried rose-leaves, and spilt attar, and old wine,
From curtained windows gathers its warm gloom
  Round all but one sweet picture, where incline
His thoughts and fancies mingled with perfume.

ON CERTAIN CRITICS

THERE are who bid us chant this modern age,
With all its shifting hopes and crowded cares,
School-boards and land-laws, votes and state-affairs,
And, one by one, the puny wars we wage;
They charge us with our lyric flutes assuage
The hunger that the lean-ribbed peasant bears,
Or wreathe our laurel round the last gray hairs
Of the old pauper in his workhouse-cage,—
Not wisely; for the round world spins so fast,
Leaps in the air, staggers, and shoots, and halts,—
We know not what is false or what is true;
But in the firm perspectives of the past
We see the picture duly, and its faults
Are softly moulded by a filmy blue.

AUGUST

THE soul is like a song-bird, and must hold
  Its silent August, or its heart would break;
  From the hot rushes of the unruffled lake
No warbler pipes, and where the elms enfold
Blackbird and thrush, no music is outrolled;
  They wait in solitude and voiceless ache,
  Till, with serenest winds, September wake
The enchanted pipes and wingèd age of gold.
So with the heart; and therefore blame thou not,
  Brisk lover, that thy pensive maid is mute,
    Wandering beside thee with a downcast air;
She is not heedless, nor thy love forgot,
  But passion dons her dreamy autumn suit
    To wake renewed in beauty, freshly fair.

WRESTLING WITH THE ANGEL

It was not when my enemy had made
  Large progress, and his youth sustained him well,
  But on the solemn morning that he fell
My soul withdrew apart and was afraid;
And at the door of my bright hopes I stayed,
  And wondered at the sudden miracle,
  And shuddered inwardly, since who could tell
Why my foe's sinew and not mine decayed?
So, in the peace around, and when men came
  To press my hands and murmur words of praise,
  I shrank abashed, and hid me from their gaze,
Longing to be like Jacob, tired and lame,
But wrestling still with One whose gracious name
  When all the night was past should break in blaze.

TO TERESA

DEAR child of mine, the wealth of whose warm hair
  Hangs like ripe clusters of the apricot,
  Thy blue eyes, gazing, comprehend me not,
But love me, and for love alone I care;
Thou listenest with a shy and serious air,
  Like some Sabrina from her weedy grot
  Outpeeping coyly when the noon is hot
To watch some shepherd piping unaware.
'Twas not for thee I sang, dear child;—and yet
  Would that my song could reach such ears as thine,
Pierce to young hearts unsullied by the fret
  Of years in their white innocence divine;
Crowned with a wreath of buds still dewy-wet,
  O what a fragrant coronal were mine!

UNHEARD MUSIC

Men say that, far above our octaves, pierce
  Clear sounds that soar and clamour at heaven's high gate,
  Heard only of bards in vision, and saints that wait
In instant prayer with godly-purgèd ears:
This is that fabled music of the spheres,
  Undreamed of by the crowd that, early and late,
  Lift up their voice in joy, grief, hope, or hate,
The diapason of their smiles and tears.
The heart's voice, too, may be so keen and high
  That Love's own ears may watch for it in vain,
  Nor part the harmonies of bliss and pain,
Nor hear the soul beneath a long kiss sigh,
Nor feel the caught breath's throbbing anthem die
  When closely-twinèd arms relax again.

PÉRIGUEUX

To H. T.

The little southern city, full of light,
  Full of warm light, and coloured like a peach;
  The river winnowing either chalky beach
With eddying streams from some vine-haunted height;
Those pillar'd windows hung with kerchiefs bright,
  That rosy bell-tower with its mellow speech
  In liquid bells that murmured each to each,
Those fleecy, full acacias, robed in white!
Ah! most those warm acacias! like a tune
  Their odour fell and rose and died away
All through that noiseless dreamy afternoon;
  Beside the quay you sat and sketched; I lay
  To watch the trembling breezes lift and sway
The boughs through which there climbed a shadowy moon.

THE VOICE OF D. G. R.

From this carved chair wherein I sit to-night,
The dead man read in accents deep and strong,
Through lips that were like Chaucer's, his great song
About the Beryl and its virgin light;
And still that music lives in death's despite,
And though my pilgrimage on earth be long,
Time cannot do my memory so much wrong
As e'er to make that gracious voice take flight.
I sit here with closed eyes; the sound comes back,
With youth, and hope, and glory on its track,
A solemn organ-music of the mind;
So, when the oracular moon brings back the tide,
After long drought, the sandy channel wide
Murmurs with waves, and sings beneath the wind.

April 1882.

THE TWOFOLD CORD

SINGLY we fight against enormous odds,—
  Dulness, and Cowardice, and Fate, and Chance,
  And the wild bowman, purblind Ignorance,
And heaven with all its lazy brood of gods;
How, then, above the congregated clods,
  Can one man rise, and out of clay advance,
  Alone, against the sleepless countenance
Of that huge Argus-host that never nods?
So must we fall upon the fields of life,
  And bleed, and die? Nay, rather let us twain,
    Marching abreast, against that army move,
Each harnessing the other for the strife,—
  You with my will for helmet, and my brain
    For sword, while I for buckler bear your love.

THE TWOFOLD VOICE

A DOUBLE voice cries in the spirit of Man,
As though upon a mortal stage he saw
Apollo's murmuring daughter, crazed with awe,
Change parts, and shout as Clytemnestra can;
For in the blaze of life he turns to scan
The dim ghost-haunted face of outraged law,
And feels the flames rise, and the serpents gnaw
Through the gilt tissue of his hope's bright plan;
And thus the heavy animal part of him,—
Never at rest to ponder or rejoice,—
Sways, blindly shaken by that twofold voice;
Beneath the axe of Pleasure, void and dim
The dull brain reels, and the vext senses swim,
Or Conscience thrills him with her piercing noise.

BONDSERVICE OF THE HEART

WHEN by the fire we sit with hand in hand,
  My spirit seems to watch beside your knee,
Alert and eager at your least command
  To do your bidding over earth and sea;
You sigh—and of that dubious message fain,
  I scour the world to bring you what you lack,
Till, from some island of the spicy main,
  The pressure of your fingers calls me back:
You smile,—and I, who love to be your slave,
  Post round the orb at your fantastic will,
Though, while my fancy skims the laughing wave,
  My hand lies happy in your hand, and still;
Nor more from fortune or from life would crave
  Than that dear silent service to fulfil.

THE FEAR OF DEATH

LAST night I woke and found between us drawn,—
Between us, where no mortal fear may creep,—
The vision of Death dividing us in sleep;
And suddenly I thought, Ere light shall dawn
Some day,—the substance, not the shadow, of Death
Shall cleave us like a sword. The vision passed,
But all its new-born horror held me fast,
And till day broke I listened for your breath.
Some day to wake, and find that coloured skies,
And pipings in the woods, and petals wet,
Are things for aching memory to forget;
And that your living hands and mouth and eyes
Are part of all the world's old histories!—
Dear God! a little longer, ah not yet!

THE PLOT OF GRASS

DEAREST and most inseparable Friend,
Why is it that the thought of thee is bound
With one small plot of honey-scented ground,
Through which a murmuring river without end
Flows, while its eddies with the grasses blend?
Have I been there with thee? Has that low sound
In thy wise voice a tenderer echo found?
What valley is this towards which my dreams descend?
Is it that corner of your leaguered brain,
Shut in by high ambitions, and the stress
Of battling hopes and godlike imagery,
Where you grow hushed and like a child again,
Shifting your armour for an easier dress,
To sit an hour and hold me company?

A PORTRAIT

She hath lived so silently and loved so much,
  That she is deeply stirred by little things,
  While pain's long ache and sorrow's sharper stings
Scarce move her spirit that eludes their clutch;
But one half-tone of music, or the touch
  Of some tame bird's eager vibrating wings,
  Breaks up the sealèd fountain's murmurings
To storm, or what in others might seem such;
So, when she lifts her serious lids to turn
  On ours her soft and magical dark eyes,
  All womanhood seems on her, in disguise;
As on the pale white peacock we discern
  The pencilled shadows of the radiant dyes
And coloured moons that on her sisters burn.

A PLEA

THE Preacher who hath fought a goodly fight
  And toiled for his great Master all day long,
  Grows faint and harassed after evensong,
And harshly chides the eager proselyte;
The Sage who strode along the even height
  Of narrow Justice severing wrong from wrong,
  Stumbles, and sinks below the common throng,
In pits of prejudice forlorn of light.
But thou, within whose veins a cooler blood
  Runs reasonably quiet, brand not thou
  With name of hypocrite each sunken brow;
To every son of man on earth who would
The Graces have not given it to be good,
  And virtuous fruit may break the laden bough.

LIBER CORDIS

"O let me love my love unto myself alone."

PALINGENESIS

I was fashioned long ago
In an element of snow,
And a white pair of cold wings
Bore me towards sublunar things;
Over thought's immense dominions,
Floating on these chilly pinions,
Long I wandered, faint and thin
As a leaf the wind may spin,
And the tossing, flashing sea
Moaned and whispered under me,
And the mountains of man's mind
Threw short shadows far behind,
And the rivers of the soul
That still thunder as they roll,
At my cold height streamed and fled
Silent as a glacier-bed.

I was light and gay and bold,
Bathing in the sunset's gold,
Though my forehead's only flush
Came from the aurora's rush,
And my white wrists held on high
Showed no blue veins coursing by.
Through the world a dream I went,
Swathed in a frozen element,
Watching with a temperate breath
All the masque of birth and death,
Pleased to mark around, below,
The currents of emotion flow,
Pleased in my insane conceit
That I had no heart to beat.

But, one morning, as I flew
Higher in the vault of blue,
On a storm's eccentric curve
All my flight began to swerve.
Ah! my crystal limbs expire
In this new domain of fire!
Ah! my dædal wings must scorch
In this vast aerial torch,
And my fairy garments made
Of the frost's breath, all will fade!

Shrieking in a robe of pain,
Darkness fell upon my brain.
When I wakened, far away
In a still green dell I lay,
Shivering, naked; warm within
What was this I heard begin
Throbbing, pulsing, like the sound
Of a hammer underground?
Then I caught a voice, repeating,
"'Tis thy new-born heart that's beating."

Since that day I have not flown
O'er the radiant world alone:
I am all content to follow
Love round this one mountain-hollow;
Weak I am, and flushed with feeling
Tender hopes around me stealing;
Tears between my eyelids creep,
And I waken still to weep:
Often as I walk along
I am agonised with song,
Thoughts of one beloved form
Lash me like a sudden storm,
And for days I travel wholly
Muffled up in melancholy.

Yet for all this weary pain
I would not be calm again,
Yield the warmth and flush and riot
For my earlier crystal quiet,
Or this burning flesh resign
For those wings and robes of mine;
Having tasted Life and Breath
And the bitter Fear of Death,
Who could any more endure
That chill æther rare and pure?
Having known the ache of loving,
And the warm veins' stir and moving,
And the yearning hopes that start,
Who would live without a heart?

THE CAST

If I could read you like a book,
  Or like a wizard's glass of old,
I might discover why you look
  So cold.

My fate runs ringing through my brain,
  I am a fool to love you so;
Will all my rashness be in vain,—
  Or no?

Your voice, your presence at my side,
  Are more than flesh and blood can bear;
I risk your anger; I decide
  To dare.

"SPACE TO BREATHE, THOUGH SHORT SOEVER"

DEAR Tyrant, for one moment set me free,
I faint, I weary of my constant ache,
Thy presence in thine absence seems to make
A harder bondage of my heart to thee;
Let me forget thee for an hour, and see
Across the east a peaceful sunrise break,
Shot with no flames enkindled for thy sake,
Bearing no pleasant pains from thee to me.
Let me forget—that like the wave of light
That floods the watcher who hath dozed at dawn,
The memory of thy mouth and hands and eyes
May rush upon me with a new delight,
Clothing the dewy trees and sparkling lawn
With all the flush and sweetness of surprise.

THE TIDE OF LOVE

Love, flooding all the creeks of my dry soul,
From which the warm tide ebbed when I was born,
Following the moon of destiny, doth roll
His slow rich wave along the shore forlorn,
To make the ocean—God—and me, one whole.

So, shuddering in its ecstasy, it lies,
And, freed from mire and tangle of the ebb,
Reflects the waxing and the waning skies,
And bears upon its panting breast the web
Of night and her innumerable eyes.

Nor can conceive at all that it was blind,
But trembling with the sharp approach of love,
That, strenuous, moves without one breath of wind,
Gasps, as the wakening maid, on whom the Dove
With folded wings of deity declined.

She in the virgin sweetness of her dream
Thought nothing strange to find her vision true;
And I thus bathed in living rapture deem
No moveless drought my channel ever knew,
But rustled always with the murmuring stream.

GUERDON

I STAND before you as a beggar stands,
  Who craves an alms and will not be denied;
  Nor shall I cease to wander at your side,
Until I gain this largess at your hands;
Give me your weary thoughts, your hours of pain,
  Your dull gray mornings, and your hopeless moods;
  If one sad moment mars your solitudes,
Give that to me, and be at ease again.
Behold, my heart is large enough to bear
  Your burdens, and to rock your heart to sleep;
Give me your griefs, I do not ask to share
  The golden harvest of the joys you reap;
Be glad alone; but when your soul's opprest,
Come here and lay your head and be at rest.

ILLUSION

Coy in a covert of the glossy bracken
My love and I sat warm, enchanted, silent,
And watched one tree against the molten azure;

Its leaves were fretted gold-work in the sunset,
And on a bough that glistered like vermilion,
A roseate bird of paradise sat preening.

Alas! my love arose and went in anger:
The east wind blew, and all the sky grew leaden,
The bloom and gloss from off the bracken faded.

And, in the hueless larch that I was watching,
On one brown branch, caught by the storms and broken,
Still sat and preened a common songless fieldfare.

THE LAPWING

How like that pied and restless bird am I
  Called Lapwing from her false and feignèd wound!
Lame on one side she painfully doth fly,
  Drooping her crest, and circling near the ground;
Such thought she takes but to conceal her brood,
  Who crowd unseen within a helpless nest,
Nor can rough idlers, though their steps intrude,
  Win that nice secret from her panting breast;
So I in many songs most deftly hide
  The tender casket of my heart's rich pain,
Lest one dear name my soul hath deified
  Be trodden upon by wandering feet profane;
I sing my songs for Love's true priests alone,
And Love must watch my nest when I am gone.

OUR WOOD IN WINTER

THE circle of the wind-swept ground
Was paved with beechen leaves around,
  Like Nero's golden house in Rome;
While here and there in solemn lines
The dark pilasters of the pines
  Bore up the high wood's sombre dome;
Between their shafts, like tapestry flung,
A soft blue vapour fell and hung.

We paused with wonder-taken breath:
It seemed a spot where frost and death
  Themselves were chained at Nature's feet;
And in the glow of youth and love,—
The coloured floor, the lights above,—
  Our hearts, refreshed, with rapture beat;
The beauty thrilled us through and through,
And closer to your side I drew.

Ah, tell me, when we both are old,—
On dismal evenings bleak and cold,
  When not a spark is in the west,
When love, aweary grown and faint,
Scarce stirs the echo of complaint
  Within the sad and labouring breast,—
Ah! tell me then, how once we stood
Transfigured in the gleaming wood.

And in a vision I shall turn
To see the fallen beech-leaves burn
  Reflected in your lifted eyes,

LIBER CORDIS

And so for one brief moment gain
The power to cast aside my pain,
  And taste once more what time denies
Nor linger till the dream has fled,
But on your shoulder sink my head.

RESERVE

As when there peal along the astonished air
  Joy-bells of some exuberant town at play,
  Laughing and shouting in its holiday;
And blind to apprehension, deaf to care,
One standing in the noisy market-square,
  Pausing an instant, pondering—if he may,—
  Will hear above the riot loud and gay
The vast cathedral-organ boom for prayer;
So when I hold your beauty in my arms,
  Above the tumult of the pulse there rings
  A music welling from diviner things;
Your soul reveals to me her nobler charms,
And in the light that dazzles and disarms,
  My too vainglorious spirit droops her wings.

WANDERJAHR

We two have strayed far from the noise of earth,
By heath and peak, by foam-distracted beach,
By little ancient towns of foreign speech,
By woodlands where the swinging birds made mirth,
By dusky towns, eyes in the moorland girth
Of hills, and in the solitude of each
Your lovelier soul has bent itself to teach
My soul the lore that follows the New Birth.
I think some fragment of our life must make
A green oasis in those mountain snows,
A sanguine flush across the wild white rose,
A bar of opal where the streamlets break,
Or in some valley there may bloom, who knows,
One little flower created for our sake?

SAND

If thou wert here I should not wander thus,
  Scribbling in aimless mood on the wild sand
  The letters of thy name, to teach the land
From Joyous Gard to Castle Perilous
What love is ours, nor, lest men mock at us,
  Return in haste, to find the breeze has fanned
  The shore, and stirred the surface, like a hand,
With smoothing fingers, light and tremulous.
Alas! by force of loving I become
  Weak as an eddy in the sandy wind,
  Faint as yon phantom-ruin scarce defined
Against the pale mysterious fields of foam;
Again along the misty strand I roam,
  Dull, drowsy, silent, patient and resigned.

TWO POINTS OF VIEW

If I forget,—
May joy pledge this weak heart to sorrow!
If I forget,—
May my soul's coloured summer borrow
The hueless tones of storm and rain,
Of ruth and terror, shame and pain,—
If I forget!

Though you forget,—
There is no binding code for beauty;
Though you forget,—
Love was your charm, but not your duty;
And life's worst breeze must never bring
A ruffle to your silken wing,—
Though you forget.

If I forget,—
The salt creek may forget the ocean;
If I forget
The heart whence flows my heart's bright motion,
May I sink meanlier than the worst,
Abandoned, outcast, crushed, accurst,—
If I forget!

Though you forget,—
No word of mine shall mar your pleasure;
Though you forget,—
You filled my barren life with treasure,
You may withdraw the gift you gave,
You still are lord, I still am slave,—
Though you forget.

CUPIDO CRUCIFIXUS

One Love there is all roseate-flushed and fair—
  This is the love that plucks the fruit of life;
One Love there is with cypress round his hair,
  The love that fought and fell in bitter strife:
Not that nor this the Shade that comes to-day
  With tender hands to soothe my beating heart,—
But the third Love that gains and gives away,
  And in renouncing holds the better part;
His eyes are very sweet, and bright with tears,
  Like thine own eyes, my Dearest, wet with love;
He knows that I am weak, and torn with fears,
  Trembling to say too much or not enough,
He knows that on the verge of hope I stand,
With Death and perilous Life on either hand.

LIBER CORDIS

RENUNCIATION

Love feeds upon the fiery trial,
  And hugs the arm that smites;
I bless you for your stern denial,
  And for my lonely nights.

If you had heaped my flame with fuel,
  And been, as I was, blind,
Time might have proved your favour cruel,
  Your tenderness unkind.

The longing flesh outwears the spirit,
  The body tires the soul;
By giving, we but half inherit,
  By holding back, the whole.

The world may keep its brutal fashion,
  And crush the rose to death;
Our ecstasy of virgin passion
  Will scent our latest breath.

I lose you, but I gain, in losing,
  Your very life and heart;
Of all that makes time sweet, in choosing,
  We chose the better part.

I lose you, but I gain for ever
  More than mere lovers hold;
I gain your ocean for their river,
  And for their dross, your gold.

Then love me, my Desire, my Wonder,
  Through change of world and weather!
Our hearts may louder beat asunder
  Than when they throbbed together.

APOLOGIA

I HAVE not sinned against the God of Love,
And so I think that when I come to die,
His face will reach to me, and hang above,
And comfort me, and hush me where I lie.

Weak am I, full of faults, and on the brink
Of Death perchance with awe my pulse shall move;
I am not fit to die, and yet I think
I have not sinned against the God of Love.

I have desired fame, riches, the clear crown
Of influence, and pleasure's long-drawn zest,
Yet at all times I would have laid these down
To please the human heart that I love best;

Wherefore I hope when I must go my way
Down that dark doubtful road that mortals prove,
Some one will cheer my shivering soul, and say,
He has not sinned against the God of Love.

IN RUSSET AND SILVER

TO TUSITALA IN VAILIMA

(ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON)

I

CLEAREST voice in Britain's chorus,
Tusitala!
Years ago, years four-and-twenty,
Gray the cloudland drifted o'er us,
When these ears first heard you talking,
When these eyes first saw you smiling.
Years of famine, years of plenty,
Years of beckoning and beguiling,
Years of yielding, shifting, baulking,—
When the good ship *Clansman* bore us
Round the spits of Tobermory,
Glens of Voulin like a vision,
Crags of Knoidart, huge and hoary,—
We had laughed in light derision,
Had they told us, told the daring
Tusitala,
What the years' pale hands were bearing,—
Years in stately, dim division.

II

Now the skies are pure above you,
Tusitala;
Feather'd trees bow down to love you;
Perfum'd winds from shining waters
Stir the sanguine-leav'd hibiscus
That your kingdom's dusk-ey'd daughters
Weave about their shining tresses;
Dew-fed guavas drop their viscous
Honey at the sun's caresses

Where eternal summer blesses
Your ethereal musky highlands,—
Ah! but does your heart remember,
Tusitala,
Westward in our Scotch September,
Blue against the pale sun's ember,—
That low rim of faint long islands,
Barren granite-snouted nesses,
Plunging in the dull'd Atlantic,
Where beyond Tiree one guesses
At the full tide, loud and frantic?

III

By strange pathways God hath brought you,
Tusitala,
In strange webs of fortune caught you,
Led you by strange moods and measures
To this paradise of pleasures!
And the bodyguard that sought you
To conduct you home to glory,—
Dark the oriflammes they carried,
In the mist their cohort tarried,—
They were Languor, Pain, and Sorrow,
Tusitala!
Scarcely we endured their story
Trailing on from morn to morrow,
Such the devious road they led you,
Such the error, such the vastness,
Such the cloud that overspread you,
Under exile bow'd and banish'd,
Lost, like Moses in the fastness,
Till we almost deem'd you vanish'd.

IN RUSSET AND SILVER

IV

Vanish'd? ay, that's still the trouble,
Tusitala!
Though your tropic isle rejoices,
'Tis to us an isle of Voices
Hollow like the elfin double
Cry of disembodied echoes,
Or an owlet's wicked laughter,
Or the cold and hornèd gecko's
Croaking from a ruined rafter,—
Voices these of things existing,
Yet incessantly resisting
Eyes and hands that follow after;
You are circled, as by magic,
In a surf-built palmy bubble,
Tusitala;
Fate hath chosen, but the choice is
Half delectable, half tragic,
For we hear you speak, like Moses,
And we greet you back, enchanted,
But reply's no sooner granted,
Than the rifted cloud-land closes.

September 1894.

IN RUSSET AND SILVER

Life, that, when youth was hot and bold,
Leaped up in scarlet and in gold,
Now walks, by graver hopes possessed,
In russet and in silver dressed.

IN RUSSET AND SILVER

THIS body, that was warm of old,
And supple, grows constrained and cold;
These hands are drawn and dry, these eyes
Less eager as they grow more wise.

The sunlight where I used to lie
And bathe as in a pool of sky,
Is now too violent and bold,
And makes my nerves ache. I grow old.

When I was young, and did not know
The blessedness of being so,
Stray glances set me on the rack,
And sent strange shivers down my back.

But now those very glances seem
To come from phantoms in a dream;
The unknown eyes that flashed, divine,
Must now be middle-aged, like mine.

And tho' I'm blithe and boisterous yet,
With all my cronies round me set,
There enters one who's really young,
And I grow gray. My knell has rung.

Then let me waste no whimpering mood
On languid nerves and refluent blood,
But at this parting of the ways
Take counsel with my length of days.

For this is health, it seems to me,
And not an ill philosophy,
To rise from life's rich board before
The host can point me to the door.

IN RUSSET AND SILVER

So, not forgetful of the past,
Nor sulking that it could not last;
Rememb'ring, like a song's lost notes,
The gleaming husks of my wild oats;

Not, priggish, glorying in a boast
That I have never lov'd nor lost;
Not, puritanic, with a flail
Destroying others' cakes and ale;

But, with new aims and hopes, prepare
To love earth less, and more haunt air;
And be as thankful as I can
To miss the beast that harries man.

Thank God, that, while the nerves decay
And muscles desiccate away,
The brain's the hardiest part of men,
And thrives till three-score years and ten;

That, tho' the crescent flesh be wound
In soft unseemly folds around,
The heart may, all the days we live,
Grow more alert and sensitive.

Then, thews and prickly nerves, adieu!
Thanks for the years I spent with you;
Gently and cheerfully we part;
Now I must live for brain and heart.

IMPRESSION

In these restrained and careful times
Our knowledge petrifies our rhymes;
Ah! for that reckless fire men had
When it was witty to be mad.

When wild conceits were piled in scores,
And lit by flaring metaphors,
When all was crazed and out of tune,—
Yet throbbed with music of the moon.

If we could dare to write as ill
As some whose voices haunt us still,
Even we, perchance, might call our own
Their deep enchanting undertone.

We are too diffident and nice,
Too learned and too over-wise,
Too much afraid of faults to be
The flutes of bold sincerity.

For as this sweet life passes by,
We blink and nod with critic eye;
We've no words rude enough to give
Its charm so frank and fugitive.

The green and scarlet of the Park,
The undulating streets at dark,
The brown smoke blown across the blue,
This coloured city we walk through,—

The pallid faces full of pain,
The field-smell of the passing wain,
The laughter, longing, perfume, strife,
The daily spectacle of life;—

IN RUSSET AND SILVER

Ah! how shall this be given to rhyme,
By rhymesters of a knowing time?
Ah! for the age when verse was glad,
Being godlike, to be bad and mad.

DISCIPLINE

My life is full of scented fruits,
  My garden blooms with stocks and cloves;
Yet o'er the wall my fancy shoots,
  And hankers after harsher loves.

"Ah! why,"—my foolish heart repines,—
  "Was I not housed within a waste?
These velvet flowers and syrop-wines
  Are sweet, but are not to my taste.

"A howling moor, a wattled hut,
  A piercing smoke of sodden peat,
The savour of a roasted nut,
  Would make my weary pulses beat."

O stupid brain that blindly swerves,
  O heart that strives not, nor endures,
Since flowers are hardship to your nerves,
  Thank heaven a garden lot is yours.

A WINTER NIGHT'S DREAM

Dreary seems the task assigned me,
Dull the play;
I would fain leave both behind me,
Steal away
Where no hopes nor cares could find me
Night or day.

Where the pirate's teak prow grapples
With pure sand,
Where Hesperidean apples
Hem the strand,
Where the silver sunlight dapples
Lake and land.

In some charm'd Saturnian island
I would be;
Watch, from glens of billowy highland,
Creeks of sea;
Crush the perfumes there awhile, and
Shake the tree.

Round the brows of naked Summer,
Noon and night,
See soft Rest, the rarest comer,
Winding bright
Garlands that would well become her
Blithe delight.

IN RUSSET AND SILVER

See dusk eyes and warm bright faces
And sleek limbs
Peer from shadowy, leafy spaces,
Whence there swims
Praise to gods of unknown graces
In strange hymns.

Eat cool fruits of foreign flavour,
Drink from shells
Wine of mild, unharmful savour,
Wine that smells
Like a copse when June winds waver
All its bells.

Live as live full-feeding cattle;
Purge mine ears
From the echoing roar and rattle
Of the years;
Then return to wholesome battle
With my peers.

REVELATION

INTO the silver night
She brought with her pale hand
The topaz lanthorn-light,
And darted splendour o'er the land;
Around her in a band,
Ringstrak'd and pied, the great soft moths came flying,
And, flapping with their mad wings, fanned
The flickering flame, ascending, falling, dying.

Behind the thorny pink
Close wall of blossom'd may,
I gaz'd thro' one green chink,
And saw no more than thousands may,—
Saw sweetness, tender and gay,—
Saw full rose lips as rounded as the cherry,
Saw braided locks more dark than bay,
And flashing eyes, decorous, pure and merry.

With food for furry friends,
She passed, her lamp and she,
Till eaves and gable-ends
Hid all that saffron sheen from me:
Around my rosy tree
Once more the silver-starry night was shining,
With depths of heaven, dewy and free,
And crystals of a carven moon declining.

Alas! for him who dwells
In frigid air of thought,
When warmer light dispels
The frozen calm his spirit sought,
By life too lately taught,
He sees the ecstatic Human from him stealing;
Reels from the joy experience brought,
And dares not clutch what Love was half revealing.

CLASPING THE CLOUD

I YEARN not for the fighting fate,
That holds and hath achieved;
I live to watch, and meditate,
And dream,—and be deceived.

Mine be the visionary star
That vibrates on the sea;
I deem Ixion happier far
Than Jupiter could be.

NUNC DIMITTIS

In youth our fiery lips were fed
With fruit in lavish waste;
We watch it now hung o'er our head,—
And, now, at length, can taste.

The boisterous pleasures of the boy
Their own deep rapture steal;
I ask no longer to enjoy,
But ah! to muse and feel.

THE SCHOOL OF FAITH

Long time across my path had lain
A far-off bar like gathering rain;
The sunshine beamed along my way,
But this drew nearer day by day.

I walked amid a laughing throng,
I plucked the flowers, I sang my song;
But all the time my load of care,
My bar of threatening cloud, was there.

Some day, I knew, that bar must break
In tempest, fatal for my sake;
And in my heart of hearts I laid
My secret, and was sore afraid.

And yet it caught me by surprise;
Loud thunders pealed across the skies;
Ere I had time for craven fear
The hour had struck. The end was near.

With lips and lids set hard together
I sank upon the springy heather;
I said farewell to pleasant things,
And waited for the angel's wings.

When, oh! the marvel! through the rain
Came odours exquisite as pain;
A softer warmth, like lovers' breath,
Danced on my cheek instead of Death.

The birds around me sang in choirs;
My eyes unclosed to clearer fires;
The storm was only sent to purge
Of cloud my sky from verge to verge!

AN EVENING VOLUNTARY

A WREATH of Turkish odour winds
  Among my books in red and gold.
The philosophic spirit finds
  Peace through the pain of growing old.

The warm blue perfume melts and fades
  Around the glowing shaft of gas;
And every nervelet that upbraids
  Takes comfort from the pangs that pass.

Purer the folding air repeats
  The cones of smoke that upward slope,
And lucid grows the brain that beats
  Less turbid with the pulse of hope.

The spirals melt in fragrant mist,
  And through that mist my books shine clear;
Life dips in soberer amethyst
  The twilights of the fainting year.

Throb, winding belts of odorous light!
  Youth spurns me from its brilliant zest;
But age has yet its prime delight,
  For thought survives, and thought is best.

SECRETA VITÆ

Like that green marble tower of yore,
From which the great carbuncle shone,
When Floris climbed to Blanchiflor
High in the heart of Babylon,—
So steep, so smooth, so hard to reach,
The lesson only Life can teach.

She from her window, sighing, leaned
Among the basil-pots and myrrh,
And watched those roses, daily gleaned,
The amorous Emir sent to her;
She sighed; nor dreamed roses would be
A ladder to her heart set free.

Before her door the flowers lay heaped;
But, heedless while she sat, and span,
Out of the trampled roses leaped
A nameless mother-naked man;
Yet o'er his shoulders straight she threw
The mantle trimmed with watchet blue.

By steps unseen, by cords unknown,
Life scales the tower that hems our hearts;
The soul sits languid and alone,
When, sudden, into flame it starts.
Whence came the stranger? Who can tell?
What matters, now that all is well!

Between the swallows and the stars
To wait is all that hope can do;
Between the weary window-bars,
To watch the fading belts of blue;
To wait, and hold a balanced mind,
Till Life his promised bride shall find.

Ah! for the simple guileless faith
  That raves not at the bolts of fate;
Ah! for the patient tongue that saith,
  "Though late he cometh, not too late!"
The heart that beats in coolest rhyme
With "God's good time," and "in God's good
    time."

Here in my marble tower I sit;
  Ah! sick of pacing to and fro;
But the hour's vast ruddy lamp is lit
  And stains with rose the world below;
He surely comes! the night air sings
With tremors of his rushing wings.

Long sought, long dreamed of, long withstood,
  Cajoled by youth, and foiled by sin,
Ethereal Love! immortal Good!
  O, thine own pathway to me win;
Nor let me faint in hopeless strife,
Until I clasp the core of life!

A TRAGEDY WITHOUT WORDS

Passion no more in these last days requires
The old stock-rant of vows and darts and fires;
We quit the frantic stage and turn to see
A finer art, a tenderer mimicry,
But find, as through this subtler world we rove,
That, tho' a sworn Carthusian, love is Love.

Hear, in a house of peaceful days and nights,
Full of sequestered virtues, cold delights,
How two young souls could, unsuspected, fashion
A long-drawn elfin tragedy of passion.
No vows were made, no sealèd springs were broken,
No kiss was given, no word of love was spoken;
Among calm faces clustered round the fire,
These two played out their drama of desire.

Who knows what unseen prompter pulled the strings?
What curtain sank and wrapped them round with wings?
Not Bion, not Sebaste! Yet they know
A wild wind drove their spirits to and fro,
Swept by,—and left them, when it passed away,
Two weary actors in a finished play.

Heaven, air, and earth, spectators nothing loth,
Hung at their lips, surmised, and watched them both;
What did the March gray sky divine at length
In that sparse wood where the wind spent its strength?
Each twig of ash, contorted, tipped with black,
Whipped Bion on, and strained him at the rack;
Each primrose, darting from the arms of Death,
Dazzled Sebaste, caught her panting breath;

He plucked a flower, and with a masking jest
Craved leave to lay it on her silken breast;
She laughed, but though they both dissembled well,
One act was over, and the curtain fell.

Now thro' that noiseless house by day and night
The keen electric storm rose to its height.
What beating hearts, what dewy-glistening eyes,
What breathless questions, what demure replies!
The scented twirls of wood-smoke, thin and blue,
Straight to their inmost souls like incense flew;
When the logs fell, they started as from sleep,
Watched o'er the hearth the smouldering ruin creep,
Stole glances, met in lightning, sped apart,—
Each sitting languid with a throbbing heart.

So runs another act; next morning, see
Another actor, and their parts are three!
That blue-gray form! that rich and jetty throat!
Hark! from a russet breast that liquid note!
How like a flash the redstart's sudden flight
Darts warm with love across Sebaste's sight!
How sleek the wings which back discreetly move,—
Like Bion's thoughts that hover round his love!
The shapely bird, those thorny boughs between,
Pours out his song, a god from a machine,
Folds and unfolds his twinkling tail in sport,
Twits now a challenge, now a brisk retort,
And makes the lover-pair so fiercely glad
That they could die for joy,—they feel so sad.

But when the snow along the woodland crest
Caught them at dusk, their pain was worst and best
Within Sebaste's heart the flood rose higher,
A keener perfume whirled across the pyre;

She felt his breath along her cheek, and glanced
Sidelong, where on dark air his profile danced;
Her hand lay tingling on his bended arm,
Each finger thrilled to find the sleeve so warm,
While down her shell-pink cheek, severe and pure,
Long lashes drooped with maiden mirth demure.

This was the hour; but Bion's swifter heat
Outstepped his pulse, and flung him at her feet,
Tame with excess of boldness just when she
Was ready for the mutual mastery;
The longed-for moment in the sparkling air,
The frost which twinkled in her tawny hair,
The gathering nonchalance in maiden blood,—
All, all were wasted on his flagging mood;
The spent bow twanged not, and 'twas all in vain
Sebaste smiled on his uncouth disdain;
He found no word, till she began to link
A scarlet anger with her white and pink,
And then—'twas worse than none; and dull and wan
Back thro' the whitening woods went maid and man.

That night the frosty world was whelmed in rain,
With restless hand wearying the window-pane;
Deep in each silent twilight chamber lay
A heart that weighed the fortune of the day;
Slowly the blank night wasted; sleep at last
Cooled each loud pulse, and closed each eyelid fast.

Sebaste waked; the pale blue sky peeped in
And helped the cool transition to begin;
Within her breast the night's cold seal had set
Its deep conviction, "Better to forget";
The hour of joyous abnegation past,
The virginal reaction fall'n at last,

She, looking back in wonder at the stir
Of pulses thrilled, held them no part of her,
And pressed her slender wrists with joy to find
Herself restored to her own quiet mind.

Bion, meanwhile, blushing with rage, rehearsed
The uncaptured hour, and his false coldness curst,
Ran o'er the tortures of the dark, and found
No ambush from the archers' stalking ground,—
No ambush except one, the vow to borrow
From last night's weakness strength to win the morrow,
Nor ever battled in so brave a heat
As now, upon the sting of his defeat.

They met afar. Loathing his faint disdain,
With passion seven times heated in his brain,
Bion gazed humbly at her distant eyes,
Noted her questions, weighed her light replies,
Marked when she rose, and joined her at the lawn,
Voiceless, by chords of tender longing drawn.

Silent they stood; then, thro' their lack of speech
Nature once more revealed them each to each.
Close to their very feet a squirrel came,
With feathery tail whisking his ears of flame,
Seized in pink fingers nuts and shreds of cake,
Then in long leaps raced downward to the lake.

Ah! who shall say what bond the creature broke?
What in that moment as in thunder spoke?
Each turned and saw the other's soul unveiled,
Each heart the other's secret being scaled;
She read his passion, penitent and wroth,
And pitied,—as a star might watch a moth;
He marked her cold conviction, and fell back,
As slips a boulder on a mountain track.

IN RUSSET AND SILVER

The play was done, and after one short sigh,
He stretched his hand to her with but "Good-bye!"
She took it, and such mercy Heaven extends—
Held it one moment longer than a friend's;
Then on the wet bright sward they turned and went,
Self-sentenced each to mutual banishment.

MANES, THE HERETIC

To J. L., De T.

Dark, dark at last! and this warm tide of scent,—
A west wind in a cedarn element,—
These cold leaves of the lily out of sight,
And the long single ray of sacred light!

'Tis night, then; I have slept, and o'er my sleep
The soul of love has hovered close and deep.

A bat moves in the porphyry capitals,
And cuts the clear-drawn radiance as it falls;
So man, intruding in his bestial way,
Shears from the lamp of God the heavenly ray.

Ah! to my keen and tempered senses rise
The temple-perfumes like a people's cries,—
The cinnamon, a prayer beneath the stars,
Adoring love pulsed from the nenuphars,
Sharp aloes, like a soul that strives with sin,
And myrrh, the song of one all chaste within;
In each I join, on each my spirit flies
To float, a thread of mist, along the skies.

By every way I soar to God's abode,
But rising perfumes pave the smoothest road.

Hail! Soul of all things, parted, yet not lost,
One sea of myriad breakers torn and tost,
One river eastward, westward, northward bent
And branching through a monstrous continent,
Yet drawn at last by every winding road
Down to that noiseless marish which is God!

Thou art the wind that like a player's hand
Strikes out harp-music where these columns stand,
Thou art the small hushed cry of crisp dry life
The terebinth gives beneath the carver's knife,
And the soft alabaster sighs for Thee
When the pale sculptor shreds it on his knee.

I pluck these fig-leaves, broad, and smooth as silk,
And godhead weeps from them in tears of milk;
I catch those fish of glimmering head and tail,
And godhead sparkles from each fading scale.
I draw the Indian curtain from my bed,
And Thou the lustrous arch above my head;
It falls in folds, and this one beam I see,
O tender heavenly Light, is trebly Thee!

Ah! Thou, invoked by many a mystic sign,
Bend hither from Thy secret crystalline;
O'er Thy twin angels' arms be seen to move;
Let Light and Perfume teach me Thou art Love.
In this dusk world of scentless, hueless man
My soul once heard Thee, and to light it ran,
Shot leaf and bud from out its watery bed,
And in adoring fragrance Thee-wards spread.
Then Thy soft ray, ineffable, divine,
Flushed my cold petals with ecstatic wine,
The pistils trembled, and the stamens flew
Straight to the centre, where their god they knew,
Clung quivering there, enkindled and aglow,
Sank, big with blessing, on the leaves below;
I bowed,—and deep within my soul I found
A fount of balm for dying worlds around.

And now, within the temple they have built,
I live to expiate a nation's guilt;
To me they blindly pray, I handing on
To Thee the essence of each orison.

IN RUSSET AND SILVER

I bask within one narrow'd beam all day,
And sleep all night within this single ray;
While, like the sound of many an instrument,
Floats round me ever this rich tide of scent.
So may I live till all my dreams are o'er,
Then on a shaft of radiance upward soar,
Fade as a thread of dew the sun draws up,
And, kindled high in heaven's inverted cup,
Like some aroma melt into the sense
Of Thy supine and cold omnipotence.

THE NEW MEMNON

To A. L.

When with hammers of iron Cambyses had broken
The statue of Memnon that sang to the sun,
And the desolate marble no longer gave token
That twilight had ended and dawn had begun,
The priesthood who long had been punctual and choral
To wait on their god as the stars waned away,
Drowsed on in their beds while the clouds flushed auroral,
Or droned in the desecrate temple of Day.

So the slow wave of fashion ebbed down from the wonder,
And worshippers failed at the bountiful shrine,—
Where never the shock of the sun aroused thunder,
Or music welled forth from the stone un-divine;
Yet, when all had deserted, one chieftain came creeping
Through reeds and through grasses where Memnon lay bare,
Night after dull night, when the priests were all sleeping,
Came yearning and dreaming, and dared not despair.

To him, so the tale runs, one morning when slender
The naked beam flushed on the shattered white stone,
A word came in message, so thrilling, so tender,
It sobbed like a harp-string that dies in a moan;

"My son! all is done, all is done!" and so ended;
He fell on his face, and, by gift of the god,
In the growing blue blaze of day, African, splendid,
His heart sank as cold as the granite he trod.

So be it with all of my being that's mortal,
If ever that tyrant, the World, should destroy
The wonderful image which stands at my portal
And sings to my spirit of hope and of joy;
When the rose-flame of thought on that marble illusion
Rings music no more from its sensitive heart,
When I've waited and watched, and the faithful delusion
Sighs forth a farewell, and I feel it depart;—

Ah! then in the gloom of my broken ideal,
In the concave moon-shadow away from the sun,
When the horrors of earth are grown rugged and real,
By some fortunate stroke may my coil be undone;
Ah! better to pass to the sullen dumb hollows
Where sounds never jar on the ear of the dead,
Than to learn that the air which my destiny follows
By some trick of a huckster was fostered and fed.

IN RUSSET AND SILVER

CHATTAFIN

I

My orchard blooms with high September light;
Opal and topaz star the burning grass;
The hedgerow-fluted meadows climb the height,
And into gulfs of silver'd azure pass;
The glittering hawk-weed turns to golden glass
The dew'd enamel of the rough pale field;
With laden boughs, a lichen-hoary mass,
Rolls the arch'd canopy of autumn's yield,
And hides a liquid gloom beneath its leafy shield.

II

Come to me now, while all the winds are dumb,
And, floating in this earthly hyaline,
Bring me no whisper of the harsh world's hum,
But, with an indolence attuned to mine,
Pass to my soul the thoughts that wave in thine;
Like those twin brooks that stir our field below
Whose sparkles meet in music; they divine
No first nor second place, but all they know
Is that with doubled strength they hurrying seaward flow.

III

Come to me now; come from the mart of men,
To this monastic court of apple-trees.
See, the gray heron rises from the fen,
And mark! his slower mate by long degrees
Follows and flaps to stiller shades than these;
They wing their lonesome meditative way
To some hush'd elbow of the reedy leas;
O let us lose ourselves in flight, as they
Their heart's sequestered law thus tenderly obey.

IV

Here all is gained we waste our lives demanding;
Here all things meet that, feverish, we pursue;
The peace of God that passeth understanding
Falls on this place, and, like a chrism of dew,
Without a murmur, steeps us thro' and thro';
Here hopes are pure, and aims are cool and high;
Here Pisgah-glints of Heaven may greet our view;
O come and in green light of glory lie,
And talk of song or death, without a flush or sigh.

THE WOUNDED GULL

To P. H. G., Jr.

Along a grim and granite shore
With children and with wife I went,
And in our face the stiff breeze bore
Salt savours and a samphire scent.

So wild the place and desolate,
That on a rock before us stood—
All upright, silent and sedate—
Of slate-gray gulls a multitude.

The children could not choose but shout
To see these lovely birds so near,
Whereat they spread their pinions out,
Yet rather in surprise than fear.

They rose and wheeled around the cape,
They shrieked and vanished in a flock—
But lo! one solitary shape
Still sentinelled the lonely rock.

The children laughed, and called it tame!
But ah! one dark and shrivell'd wing
Hung by its side; the gull was lame,
A suffering and deserted thing.

With painful care it downward crept;
Its eye was on the rolling sea;
Close to our very feet, it stept
Upon the wave, and then—was free.

IN RUSSET AND SILVER

Right out into the east it went,
  Too proud, we thought, to flap or shriek;
Slowly it steered, in wonderment
  To find its enemies so meek.

Calmly it steered, and mortal dread
  Disturbed nor crest nor glossy plume;
It could but die, and being dead,
  The open sea should be its tomb.

We watched it till we saw it float
  Almost beyond our furthest view;
It flickered like a paper boat,
  Then faded in the dazzling blue.

It could but touch an English heart,
  To find an English bird so brave;
Our life-blood glowed to see it start
  Thus boldly on the leaguered wave;

And we shall hold, till life departs,
  For flagging days when hope grows dull,
Fresh as a spring within our hearts,
  The courage of the wounded gull.

THE PRODIGAL

When life is young, and all the world seems waiting
To crown the bright prince Self, his bondage done,
The callow eager heart feels no debating,
But takes affection as flowers drink the sun.

A little while, he saith, and men must know me;
A few feet more, and I must reach the light;
The private love these homely bosoms show me
Perchance may lift me into public sight.

But ah! time slowly strips the vain illusion,
And decks the fairy prince in common clothes;
The breathless ages prove a boy's delusion,
And naught so faithless as the Muses' oaths.

When battling hopes that made the fresh pulse martial,
Spring up no more behind the fife and drum,
Success may come, yet cropped and tame and partial,
And joys,—but life has faded ere they come;

Then in that pause, when pride has lost its splendour,
When foiled ambition smiles itself to sleep,
Back rush old thoughts, familiar thoughts and tender,
That slumber'd in the conscience, dumb and deep.

Then all the withered loves that once fell fading,
Stir like long weeds below a tidal sea;
Then all the thankless past returns upbraiding,—
Then all my memory turns in shame to thee.

IN RUSSET AND SILVER

The trustful bird close to thy window flutters,
  The squirrel takes his breakfast from thy hand,
And every accent that thy whisper utters
  Thrills the meek subjects of thy garden-land.

Thou hast the crafty voice, the magic fingers
  That round the woodland pulse have art to twine,
Yet oft I think, among thy serfs and singers,
  The wildest capture was this heart of mine.

Ah! take me home; my pride of pinion broken,
  My song untuned, my morning-light decayed!
I bring thee back thine own old love for token
  That I am he for whom it toiled and prayed.

Undone the toil, and vain the intercession!
  But ah! beneath thy fire for my success
There lurked a hungry sense of lost possession,
  And for my failure thou'lt not love me less.

Dear! for my sake the streets will ne'er be lighted;
  The senate never ring with cheers for me!
Open thy garden-gate to one benighted,
  And take me safely back to peace and thee.

NEURASTHENIA

Non malattia mortale,
Mà fu celeste forza;
Non propria ellitione,
Mà un impeto fatal.
Sperone.

Curs'd from the cradle and awry they come,
Masking their torment from a world at ease;
On eyes of dark entreaty, vague and dumb,
They bear the stigma of their souls' disease.

Bewildered by the shadowy ban of birth,
They learn that they are not as others are,
Till some go mad, and some sink prone to earth,
And some push stumbling on without a star;

And some, of sterner mould, set hard their hearts,
To act the dreadful comedy of life,
And wearily grow perfect in their parts;—
But all are wretched and their years are strife.

The common cheer that animates mankind,
The tender general comfort of the race,
To them is colour chattered to the blind,
A book held up against a sightless face.

Like sailors drifting under cliffs of steel,
Whose fluttering magnets leap with lying poles,
They doubt the truth of every law they feel,
And death yawns for them if they trust their souls.

The loneliest creatures in the wash of air,
They search the world for solace, but in vain;
No priest rewards their confidence with prayer,
And no physician remedies their pain.

Ah! let us spare our wrath for these, forlorn,
Nor chase a bubble on the intolerant wave;
Let pity quell the gathering storm of scorn,
And God, who made them so, may soothe and save.

ALERE FLAMMAM

To A. C. B.

In ancient Rome, the secret fire,—
  An intimate and holy thing,—
Was guarded by a tender choir
  Of kindred maidens in a ring;
Deep, deep within the home it lay,
  No stranger ever gazed thereon,
But, flickering still by night and day,
  The beacon of the house, it shone;
Thro' birth and death, from age to age,
It passed, a quenchless heritage;

And there were hymns of mystic tone
  Sung round about the family flame,
Beyond the threshold all unknown,
  Fast-welded to an ancient name;
There sacrificed the sire as priest,
  Before that altar, none but he;
Alone he spread the solemn feast
  For a most secret deity;
He knew the god had once been sire,
And served the same memorial fire.

Ah! so, untouched by windy roar
  Of public issues loud and long,
The Poet holds the sacred door,
  And guards the glowing coal of song;
Not his to grasp at praise or blame,
  Red gold, or crowns beneath the sun,
His only pride to tend the flame
  That Homer and that Virgil won,
Retain the rite, preserve the act,
And pass the worship on intact.

Before the shrine at last he falls;
  The crowd rush in, a chattering band;
But, ere he fades in death, he calls
  Another priest to ward the brand;
He, with a gesture of disdain,
  Flings back the ringing brazen gate,
Reproves, repressing, the profane,
  And feeds the flame in primal state,
Content to toil and fade in turn
If still the sacred embers burn.

THE SWAN

The awakening swan grows tired at last
  Of weltering pastures where he feeds
With wings and feet behind him cast,
  He cleaves the labyrinth of the reeds.

He arches out his sparkling plumes,
  He wades and plunges, till he finds
Beneath his breast the azure glooms
  Where the great river brims and winds.

Then, with white sails set to the breeze,
  The current cold about his feet,
He fares to those Hesperides
  Where morning and his comrades meet.

Nor—since within his kindling veins
  A livelier ichor stirs at last—
Regrets the gross and juicy stains,
  The saps and savours of the past;

But through the august and solemn void
  Of misty waters holds his way,
By some ecstatic thirst decoyed
  Towards raptures of the radiant day.

So sails the soul, and cannot rest,
  Inglorious, in the marsh of peace,
But leaves the good, to seek the best,
  Though all its calms and comforts cease,—

Though what it seems to hold be lost,
  Though that grow far which once was nigh,—
By torturing hope in anguish tossed,
  The awakened soul must sail or die.

THE NAUTILUS

VENUS, take this shell,
  Offering of a bride!
Once it rose and fell
  On thy moony tide;
Let its pearly bulwarks dwell
  By thy side.

Rigged with gossamer,
  O'er thy seas it flew;
Never a wind would stir
  Cord or sail or crew;
Halcyon-like, this mariner
  Cleft the blue.

Blithe even so was I,
  Gay, light-hearted maid;
Now my sails are dry,
  My fond crew afraid;
Goddess, goddess! come, I cry,
  To my aid!

Is it bliss or woe,
  Nevermore to flee
O'er the full heart's flow,
  Indolent and free,—
As this shell strayed long ago
  O'er the sea?

Venus, take this shell,
  Pearly like a tear!
Ah! I cannot tell
  What I wish or fear;
Guard me through the miracle,
  Dread and dear.

A DREAM OF NOVEMBER

To Arthur Symons

Far, far away, I know not where, I know not how,
The skies are gray, the boughs are bare, bare boughs in flower;
Long lilac silk is softly drawn from bough to bough,
With flowers of milk and buds of fawn, a broidered shower.

Beneath that tent an Empress sits, with slanted eyes,
And wafts of scent from censers flit, a lilac flood;
Around her throne bloom peach and plum in lacquered dyes,
And many a blown chrysanthemum, and many a bud.

She sits and dreams, while bonzes twain strike some rich bell,
Whose music seems a metal rain of radiant dye;
In this strange birth of various blooms, I cannot tell
Which sprang from earth, which slipped from looms, which sank from sky.

Beneath her wings of lilac dim, in robes of blue,
The Empress sings a wordless hymn that thrills her bower;
My trance unweaves, and winds, and shreds, and weaves anew
Dark bronze, bright leaves, pure silken threads, in triple flower.

ON YES TOR

Beneath our feet, the shuddering bogs
Made earthquakes of their own,
For greenish-grizzled furtive frogs
And lizards lithe and brown;

And high to east and south and west,
Girt round the feet with gorse,
Lay, summering, breast by giant breast,
The titan brood of tors;

Golden and phantom-pale they lay,
Calm in the cloudless light,
Like gods that, slumbering, still survey
The obsequious infinite.

Plod, plod, through herbage thin or dense;
Past chattering rills of quartz;
Across brown bramble-coverts, whence
The shy black ouzel darts;

Through empty leagues of broad, bare lands,
Beneath the empty skies,
Clutched in the grip of those vast hands,
Cowed by those golden eyes,

We fled beneath their scornful stare,
Like terror-hunted dogs,
More timid than the lizards were,
And shyer than the frogs.

PHILOMEL IN LONDON

To G. A. A.

Not within a granite pass,
Dim with flowers and soft with grass—
Nay, but doubly, trebly sweet
In a poplared London street,
While below my windows go
Noiseless barges, to and fro,
  Through the night's calm deep,
Ah! what breaks the bonds of sleep?

No steps on the pavement fall,
Soundless swings the dark canal;
From a church-tower out of sight
Clangs the central hour of night.
Hark! the Dorian nightingale!
Pan's voice melted to a wail!
  Such another bird
Attic Tereus never heard.

Hung above the gloom and stain—
London's squalid cope of pain—
Pure as starlight, bold as love,
Honouring our scant poplar-grove,
That most heavenly voice of earth
Thrills in passion, grief or mirth,
  Laves our poison'd air,
Life's best song-bath crystal-fair.

While the starry minstrel sings
Little matters what he brings,
Be it sorrow, be it pain;
Let him sing and sing again,

Till, with dawn, poor souls rejoice,
Wakening, once to hear his voice,
Ere afar he flies,
Bound for purer woods and skies.

SONG FOR MUSIC

Count the flashes in the surf,
  Count the crystals in the snow,
Or the blades above the turf,
  Or the dead that sleep below!
  These ye count—yet shall not know,—
While I wake or while I slumber,—
  Where my thoughts and wishes go,
What her name, and what their number.

Ask the cold and midnight sea,
  Ask the silent-falling frost,
Ask the grasses on the lea,
  Or the mad maid, passion-crost!
  They may tell of posies tost
To the waves where blossoms blow not,
  Tell of hearts that staked and lost,—
But of me and mine they know not.

HOPE DEFERRED

FAINT lines of gray are in that hair
That was one year ago so fair,
  So curl'd in gold, so wav'd with light,
And still the feathery hours flit by,
And we grow older, you and I,
And still I wait for your reply,
  And all your answer still is flight.

You touch my hand a little while,
You pierce me with your flashing smile,
  You dart away, away, away!
O for the skill to hold you fast,
O for the art to win at last
One sunset-hour ere life be past,
  One thrill before the nerves decay.

TO A TRAVELLER

FROM THE GREEK

AFTER many a dusty mile,
Wanderer, linger here awhile;
Stretch your limbs in dewy grass;
Through these pines a wind shall pass
That shall cool you with its wing;
Grasshoppers shall shout and sing;
While the shepherd on the hill,
Near a fountain warbling still,
Modulates, when noon is mute,
Summer songs along his flute;
Underneath a spreading tree,
None so easy-limbed as he,
Sheltered from the dog-star's heat.

Rest; and then, on freshened feet,
You shall pass the forest through.
It is Pan that counsels you.

THE FIELDFARE'S NEST

To E. B.

THOUGH all should smile denying, I believe
These elms have borne the Fieldfare's fabulous nest.
Why else in England should he build and rest,
Quitting the flock in which his brethren leave

Our shores forsaken on an April eve,
Save, on these lawns, to preen a speckled breast,
And hear your feathery friends proclaim you blest?
Where else so safe a bower could fieldfare weave?

Ah! might he borrow notes as sweet as those
With which the Mavis pays you all day long
(Our delicate Mavis with her slighted song),
You would not doubt the enchanted Fieldfare knows
This magic garden's secret of repose,
And reads her heart to whom these glades belong.

CIRCLING FANCIES

AROUND this tree the floating flies
  Weave their mysterious webs of light;
The scent of my acacia lies
  Within the circle of their flight;
  They never perch nor drop from sight,
But, flashing, wheel in curves of air,
  As if the perfume's warm delight
In magic bondage held them there.

I watch them till I half confound
  Their motions with these thoughts of mine
That no less subtle bonds have bound
  Within a viewless ring divine;
  Clasped by a chain that makes no sign
My hopes and wheeling fancies live;
  Desires, like odours, still confine
The heart that else were fugitive.

Then flash and float thro' tides of June,
  Ye summer phantoms of my love!
Let all the woodlands join in tune
  While on your gauzy wings ye move!
  With odour round, and light above,
Your aery symbol-circle keep,
  Till night descends; then may I prove
More constant, circling still in sleep.

LOVE-LETTERS

I've learned, in dream or legend dark,
That all love-letters purged with fire,
Drawn in one constellated spark,
To heaven aspire.

To-night there streams across the sky
An unfamiliar reef of stars;
Are those the letters you and I
Thrust through the bars?

In tears of joy they once were read,
In tears of suffering slowly burned;
And now to stars hung overhead
Can each be turned?

O leaves too warm to be discreet,
O panting words that throbbed too loud
With starry laughter now you meet
Behind a cloud!

You watch us sleeping all night long,
Until gray morning bids you fade;
You charge us, with your choral song,
Be undismayed!

Alas! the Magians knew your names,
Ye ancient lamps of amber light;
'Tis vanity of passion claims
So rare delight.

We might as well lay claim to Mars!—
And yet—I surely understand
That softest yellow flashing star's
Italian hand?

MEMORIAL VERSES

IN POET'S CORNER

OCTOBER 1892

WHEN first the clamorous poets sang, and when
Acclaim'd by hosts of men,
While music filled with silver light and shade
Cloister and colonnade,
With pomp of catafalque and laureate crown
We laid him softly down
To sleep until the world's last morning come,
My stricken lips were dumb.

But now that all is silent round his grave,
Dim, from the glimmering nave,
And in the shadow thrown by plinth and bust
His garlands gather dust,
Here, in the hush, I feel the chords unstrung
Tighten in throat and tongue;
At last, at last, the voice comes back,—I raise
A whisper in his praise.

Thanks for the music that through thirty years
Quicken'd my pulse to tears,
The eye that colour'd Nature, the wise hand,
The brain that nobly plann'd;
Thanks for the anguish of the perfect phrase,
Tingling the blood ablaze!
Organ of God, with multitudinous swell
Of various tone, farewell!

THÉODORE DE BANVILLE

BALLADE

FOR THE FUNERAL OF THE LAST OF THE JOYOUS POETS

ONE ballade more before we say good-night,
O dying Muse, one mournful ballade more!
Then let the new men fall to their delight,
The Impressionist, the Decadent, a score
Of other fresh fanatics, who adore
Quaint demons, and disdain thy golden shrine;
Ah! faded goddess, thou wert held divine
When we were young! But now each laurelled head
Has fallen, and fallen the ancient glorious line;
The last is gone, since Banville too is dead.

Peace, peace a moment, dolorous Ibsenite!
Pale Tolstoist, moaning from the Euxine shore!
Psychology, to dreamland take thy flight!
And, fell Heredity, forbear to pour
Drop after drop thy dose of hellebore,
For we look back to-night to ruddier wine
And gayer singing than these moans of thine!
Our skies were azure once, our roses red,
Our poets once were crowned with eglantine;
The last is gone, since Banville too is dead.

With flutes and lyres and many a lovely rite
Through the mad woodland of our youth they bore
Verse, like pure ichor in a chrysolite,
Secret yet splendid, and the world forswore,
For one brief space, the mocking mask it wore.

Then failed, then fell those children of the vine,—
Sons of the sun,—and sank in slow decline;
Pulse after pulse their radiant lives were shed;
To silence we their vocal names consign;
The last is gone, since Banville too is dead.

ENVOI

Prince-jeweller, whose facet-rhymes combine
All hues that glow, all rays that shift and shine,
Farewell! thy song is sung, thy splendour fled.
No bards to Aganippe's wave incline;
The last is gone, since Banville too is dead.

ANNE CLOUGH

FEBRUARY 28, 1892

ESTEEM'D, admir'd, belov'd,—farewell!
Alas! what need hast thou of peace?
Our bitterest winter tolls the knell,
And tolls, and tolls, and will not cease.

It tolls and tolls with iron tongue
For empty lives and hearts unbless'd,
And tolls for thee, whose heart was young,
Whose life was stored with hope and rest.

Thy meditative quaint replies,
Cast out like arrows on the air,
The humour in thy dark grey eyes,
The wisdom in thy silver hair,—

Tho' these grow faint, shade after shade,
As those who love thee droop and pass,
Thy being was not wholly made
To shrink like breath upon a glass.

Thou with new graces didst maintain
The old, outworn scholastic seat,
Throned, simply, with an ardent train
Of studious beauty round thy feet.

Those girls, grown mothers soon, will teach
Their sons to praise thy sacred name,
Thy hand that taught their hands to reach
The broader thought, the brighter flame.

So thou, tho' sunk amidst the gloom
That gathers round our reedy shore,
Shalt with diffused light illume
A thousand hearths unlit before.

BEATRICE

THRO' Dante's hands, in dreamy vigil clasp'd,
A pale green bud shot skyward from the sod;
He bowed and sighed; then laid the prize he grasp'd,
A folded lily, at the feet of God.

There she hath slowly open'd, age by age,
And grown a star to light Man's heart to heaven;
Her perfume his divinest heritage,
Her love the noblest gift God's self hath given.

BLAKE

They win who never near the goal;
They run who halt on wounded feet;
Art hath its martyrs like the soul,
Its victors in defeat.

This seer's ambition soar'd too far;
He sank, on pinions backward blown;
But, tho' he touched nor sun nor star,
He made a world his own.

DANTE GABRIEL ROSSETTI

All pomps and gorgeous rites, all visions old,
Nursed by the ancient Spouse of Christ serene
Within the solemn precincts of her fold,
To him were dear, as angel-wings once seen
Across a ruin'd minster's spires of gold
To some old priest in exile might have been.

The gloom, the splendour of the apse, the cloud
Of streaming incense swung aloft the choir,
The murmuring organ, muffled now, now loud,
The great rose-window like a flower on fire,
The choral shout, the countless faces bowed,—
These were the plectrum and his soul the lyre.

In leaving these he wrought his instinct wrong,—
He sprang from no protesting ancestry;
Those ancient signs of worship waked his song,
And though a pagan he might feign to be,
In Arcady he never wandered long,
Nor truly loved the goddess of the sea.

His mighty spirit was an outlaw yet
In this bright garish modern life of ours;
His statue should with Gothic kings' be set,
Engarlanded with saints and carven flowers,
Or on some dim Italian altar, wet
With votive tears and sprinkled hyssop-showers.

He is made one with all the Easter fires,
With all the perfume and the rainbow-light,
His voice is mingled with the ascending choir's,
Broken and spent through traceries infinite;
Above the rich triforium, past the spires,
The answering music melts into the night.

MEMORIAL VERSES

Farewell! though time hath vanquished our desire,
We shall not be as though he had not been;
Some love of mystic thought in strange attire,
Of things unseen reflected in the seen,
Of heights towards which the sons of flesh aspire,
Shall haunt us with a yearning close and keen.

Farewell! upon the marble of his tomb
Let some great sculptor carve a knight in prayer,
Who dreams he sees the holy vision come.
Now let the night-wind pass across his hair;
Him can no more vain backward hope consume,
Nor the world vex him with her wasting care.

Easter Sunday, 1882.

JOHN HENRY NEWMAN

AUGUST 11, 1890

PEACE to the virgin heart, the crystal brain!
Truce for one hour thro' all the camps of thought!
Our subtlest mind hath rent the veil of pain,
Hath found the truth he sought.

Who knows what script those opening eyes have read?
If this set creed, or that, or none be best?
Let no strife jar above this snow-white head!
Peace for a saint at rest!

LECONTE DE LISLE

JULY 17, 1894

His verse was carved in ivory forms, undying
  As those that deck the marble Phidian frieze.
Over his plaintive hearse to-night is flying
  A phantom genius from the Cyclades.

It hovers till our idle rites be over;
  And then will bear him in its arms away
To islands cinctured by the sun, their lover,
  And spicy woodlands thrilled with fiery day.

There his dark hours of toil shall drop, forgotten;
  There all he loved, simple and calm and grand—
All the white creatures by his Muse begotten—
  Shall cluster round him in a stately band.

Then shall he smile, appeased by sovereign beauty,
  Contented that he strove and waited long,
Since in those worlds where loveliness is duty
  His bronze and marble leap to life and song.

MADRIGAL

SET FORTH TO BE SUNG TO THE BASS VIOL IN PRAISE OF MR. BULLEN HIS EDITION OF THE WORKS OF DR. THOMAS CAMPION

HE comes again!
  The latest, not the least desired!
  Too long, in mouldering tomes retired,
We sought in vain
Those breathing airs
  Which, from his instrument,
  Like vocal winds of perfume, blent
To soothe man's piercing cares.

Bullen, well done!
  Where Campion lies in London-land,
  Lulled by the thunders of the Strand,
Screened from the sun,
Surely there must
  Now pass some pleasant gleam
  Across his music-haunted dream
Whose brain and lute are dust.

WITH A COPY OF SHAKESPEARE'S SONNETS

THIS is the holy missal Shakespeare wrote,
For friends to ponder when they grieve alone;
Within these collects his great heart would note
Its joy and fear, its ecstasy and moan;
Our strength and weakness each was felt by him;
He yearned and shrank, rejoiced and hoped and bled;
Nor ever will his sacred song be dim,
Though he himself, the Friend of Friends, is dead.
Then, on sad evenings when you think of me,
Or when the morn seems blithe, yet I not near,
Open this book, and read, and I shall be
The metre murmuring at your bended ear;
I cannot write my love with Shakespeare's art,
But the same burden weighs upon my heart.

THE AUTUMN GARDEN

PROEM

Pale thoughts, like drops of trembling dew,
By sunset of my hopes shot through;
Faint longings, colourless at noon,
But turned to beryls in the moon;

Ecstatic dreams; obscure desires,
Lit up by misty opal-fires;
Intensest visions, caught between
The flight of phantoms scarcely seen;

Within this featureless array
Of year by year and day by day,
I fix them, flashing, ere they pass,
And turn them into gems—or glass!

I string them, be they stone or paste,
I string them ere they fall to waste,
And in my fond delusion fling
The circlet o'er Time's hurrying wing.

Ah! they may hang a moment there,
Caught by a feather, high in air,—
Or they may flit to earth amain
Dissolved in tears of silver rain.

THE INTELLECTUAL ECSTASY

Hinc Stygias ebrius hausit aquas.
Diogenes Laertius.

Of Epicurus it is told
That growing weak, and faint, and cold,
And falling towards that torpid state
By doctors held as desperate,
He drowned his senses in a flood
Of th' ancient vine's ebullient blood,
Ingurgitating draughts of fire
To lull his fear and his desire.

But was he sober when he died?—
Whereto an epigram replied:
"He was too mad to taste or care
How bitter Stygian waters were;
Blest was he therefore." Can we draw
A sweetness from this cynic saw,
Or of this mithridate distil
An antidote for life's long ill?

Perchance! since, as we linger thus,
'Twixt dawn and dark swung pendulous,
Supported through our irksome state
By fond illusions of old date,
The mind within itself retires,
And there inspects its dead desires—
A soothsayer, revolving thrice
Around the ambiguous sacrifice.

In vain we toil to waken flame
Where once with scarce a breath it came;
In vain old auguries invoke
Of swarming bees and stricken oak;

THE AUTUMN GARDEN

The spirit feels no secret stir
O' the exquisite remembrancer,
And into depths, unsealed in vain,
Drop hollow-sounding tears like rain.

But still, in philosophic sense,
A purple cluster glows intense,
And from an intellectual vine
Rich madness gushes, half divine;
Droops the dull vein in chill eclipse?
A heavenly beaker slakes our lips,
And cups of thrilling freshness lend
Fantastic aid as we descend.

So, drunk with knowledge, only fed
With rapture from the fountain-head,
Until the bells of God shall call
The flush'd, insatiate bacchanal,
Let her go smiling toward her rest
On tottering footsteps, faintly blest,
And, in that fair delirium dight,
Walk down to darkness in great light.

A NIGHT IN TIME OF WAR

THE clouds are up, to sweep and tune
That inharmonious harp, the moon;
The north wind blows a harsh bassoon.

An old astrologer might say,
By signs, by portents whirled this way,
That earth was nearing her decay.

All apprehensions stir to-night
With fluttering issues infinite,
Conjunction, phantom, famine, blight;

The woodland shakes its agèd bones
And shrieks; beyond, in deeper tones
The ceremonial cypress groans;

And I, the microcosm of all,
Quake, shuddering, underneath the pall
Of nature's hurrying funeral.

Yes! though my sceptic brain rejects
My sires' chain'd causes and effects,
The nerves retain their deep defects;

And still my heart leaps in my side,—
A fluctuant ark upon its tide,—
With throbs and throes unsanctified,

And knows not how to brave the stir
Of sounds that beckon and shout to her,
Of sins that clouds and winds aver.

THE AUTUMN GARDEN

I dare not sleep to-night, for dread
Of spectral lights obscurely shed
About my plum'd and shadowy bed.

Faint, faint, these mildew'd chords that twang
So feebly, where the music rang
Deep organ-notes when Homer sang!

Ah! strange to find the quivering crests
Of long-laid faiths, forgotten guests,
Rise up at memory's dim behests!

Ah! strange to feel the soul resume
Its cast-off heritage of gloom,—
The savage turning in his tomb!

JUNE

Ah! why my heart is beating is more than I can tell,
At the hawthorn-bloom like incense in the air,
And the cuckoo in the woodland that is calling like a bell,
Like a cracked bell calling me to prayer;

But I think the ringing cuckoo, with its hard hysteric cry,
Is youth in the spring-movement of the blood,
And the richness of the blossom a reminder we must die,
While life is tasting exquisitely good.

Ah! the falling of the petals in the shivering silver night!
Ah! the turning wheel of years that will not stay!
I'd relinquish all the chances of to-morrows bold and bright
For one clutch at the delirium of to-day.

ABISHAG

O LITTLE tender rose of Bethlehem,
Lo! I am harsher than the salt sea-shore,
And purblind, like some beggar of the plain,
With knotted hair, and beard that hath not known
The comb's caress for wandering wasted years.

I know thy fingers are too fresh and cool
To lie within my gnarled and leathern hands;
I know thy kiss drops on my mouth like dew
On dust, or like those petals of the peach
Starring the ruined road to Olivet.

But I have left the pilgrims in the path
To wrangle round their creeds with shaken staves,
And I have left the thought that I am old,
For, gazing in the pools of thy dark eyes,
The mirrored portrait of myself seems young.

MONAD AND MULTITUDE

Deep in high woods, where none pass by,
Strange fancies haunt the ear and eye,
And human forms are inly seen
Where human foot hath seldom been:
So, to my restless thought to-day,
Grows populous the woodland gray—
Young, stalwart, silent warriors these
Battalions of beleaguering trees;
Each living bole, awakened, lifts
Toward golden cloud and azure rifts
Slim, slippery limbs, but lately curl'd
In coverts of the savage world,
Each naked, with its silver guard
Soft skin, and muscle folded hard.

So dreamed I, with that army round
Of forms alert, and—ne'er a sound.

Then as I lay across the bed
Of cold moss temper'd to my head,
I sang: "O million shafts of pines,
On each of whom the god-light shines,
In you the miracle I see
Of multitude in unity.
Each silken pillar stands alone;
From root to quivering twig 'tis one;
Its body drawn from earth's gray lap,
Its branches fed with gem-like sap;
Through dreamy frosts, submerged in snow,
Which spreads a twilight here below,—
Through summer opened fanlike out,
By flame of spice made smooth and stout,—

Each watched and fed and bound and guarded
As if alone of all regarded,
Yet standing in this forest fast
An atom in the tree-world vast,
One of a million—swarms that are
Mere velvet from the vale afar,
Uncounted items covering wide
The old heroic mountain-side,
Mere units from whose sacrifice
Broad complicated forests rise."

So, in the mystic world of man,
We see the endless double plan—
The single spirit, for whose boon
Alone God lighted sun and moon,
You, or yon other soul, or I,
The central wonder of the sky;
A solitary force that came
From heaven, and holds the heavenly flame;
Whose life alone contains the fears
And joys of time's unending years;
Fixed goal round which for ever stirs
The ministering universe,
Whose mighty sinew, whose clear nerve,
Whose pulse and satin skin, deserve
The best that eons can supply
Of vivid immortality.

So, gaze at the sufficing pine
For one view of your being, and mine!
But, in another view, how slight
Your hold and mine on love and light!

Items we are, of no account,
As pushing toward the sun we mount,
And 'tis but in our own conceit
We feign a godhead round our feet.

Since,—this one stunted, that one tall,
And boughs here mildewed, fit to fall,
This soiled from owls' nests, this one clean,
With shimmering fans of stainless green—
We are but parts of one design,
Monotonous and unbenign.

Last night along this huge expanse
I saw a crookèd lightning dance;
The thunder roared in hollow fit,
And all the forest moaned with it.
If from the vault in darkness steeped
A shaft of angry lightning leaped,
And tipped one pine in elfin mirth,
And scored and blasted it to earth,
Fed on its spices, burned within,
And shrivelled up its satin skin,
Where is that stricken pine to-day,
In all the forests' plumed array?

What tho' the single life be broken,
The broad, sweet woodland gives no token;
Its oneness left no wounded sense
On the undisturbed circumference,
Nor can the eye, though searching well,
Deplore that vanished miracle.

Such is the wonder of man's soul,
God-guarded, an essential whole;
Yet, in life's broad and mighty scheme,
God-unregarded, and a dream.

AT A CASINO

The night was scented like a peach,
  The balustrade was cold to touch;
The words that linked us, each to each,
  Expressed too little,—or too much!
The music sobbed beneath the trees
  That soared into a purple sky;
On nights so delicate as these
  We dare not dream that we must die.

The breeze came scented o'er the vines
  Down limestone mountains ghostly pale;
What boundless hopes the heart confines!
  And hopes should never faint nor fail.
The plaintive string, the wailing brass
  Struck up a livelier note of glee;
But moods, like clouds at midnight, pass—
  And who so sorrowful as we?

The laurels flashed their silver tongues
  Within the perfumed moonlit night;
Our pulses overflowed with songs
  Of life's ineffable delight,—
Then ebbed with fear of growing old,
  With nameless dread, with shadowy care;
The balustrade was marble-cold,
  And like a peach the wandering air.

AT ANSTEY'S COVE

THE breeze inscribes with ring on ring
The grizzled oily seas of Spring;
Around the headland, gray and pale,
Comes, like a ghost, a gliding sail.

Through brooding tides I see her come
Where once I rowed, where once I swum;
Ah! then that weltering water's hue
Was rainbow-purple, peacock-blue.

She veers and fades; she dies away
In gulfs of universal gray;
And of my boyhood and its boast
She seems the melancholy ghost.

DISILLUSION

In the mirk that circles us
  Starry clear thy image stood,
Like the gold ranunculus
  On the black pools in the wood.

While its pure refulgence shone,
  Even despair grew thin and bright,
As behind the burning sun
  Darkest ether melts to white.

Now that image quits the sky,
  Plunges like a falling star,
Slips, out of the pride on high,
  Down, down where the pities are.

What an empty world for me!
  What a night without a sound!
Suddenly eternity
  With its blackness folds me round.

THE VIOLET

Beside the dusty road of life,
Deflowered with toil and foul with strife,
Lie hid within a charm of dew
Pure harbours made for me and you.

In such a shadowy nook is set
Rest's purple-wingèd violet;
It nods upon the fitful breeze
Born in the fount's interstices;—

That fount of joy for travellers made,
Ensconced within a dappled shade,
Where still its wings our violet lifts
Beneath the pulsing air that shifts;—

The little fount that bubbles there
Under a veil of maiden-hair,
And coils through many a liquid fold
Its crystal waters dusk and cold.

So small the fount, a hidden thing,—
So weak the violet's throbbing wing,—
The haughty world in dust rides by,
Without a thought, without a sigh.

Loud, in a riot of speed and glare,
About their noisy work men fare;
With shriek of engine, yell of horn,
They glorify a world new-born.

We love the old, the timid ways,
The loose bough shutting out the blaze,
The murmur of an ancient rhyme,
Heard faintly in the ear of Time.

THE AUTUMN GARDEN

And spirits, here and there, who still
Prefer the mill-stream to the mill,
To riot, quiet, and to speed
The dance of rooted water-weed,

Across a rood or two of grass,
Unseen, into our realm will pass,
Will lean above the whispering spring,
And hear the hidden runnel sing.

And then the crimson cheek will choose
The rainbow of the pulsing dews;
Then silence calm the 'wildered brain,
And life grow sanctified again.

LIBRARY OF THE BOMBAY BRANCH OF THE ROYAL ASIATIC SOCIETY

THE AUTUMN GARDEN

A MOOD IN ITALY

Under the fluted
Velvet datura's
Trumpets of perfume
Virginal white,
Long I waited,
Leaning my elbows
Hard on the marble
Over the lake,
Dreamily questioning
What is the mystery,
What is the secret
Issue of life?
Years pass over us,
Years glide by with us,—
Years like the sandalo
Scoring the blue;
Faint white wake of it,
Noiseless oars of it,
Woundless waters
Melting behind.
What is the worth of it?
What the meaning?
What the issue
When life is done?

So, for ages,
The world has questioned,
So the philosopher,
So the saint;
Bells from the bell-tower,
Pink through the chestnuts,

THE AUTUMN GARDEN

Song from the orchard,
Prayer from the shrine.
Priest and peasant,
Lover and martyr,
Monk in his rock-cell,
King on his throne,
Ever repeating,
Ever resuming,
Ever comparing,
But all—in vain!
The sandalo passes;
Their rich September
Fainting in perfume,—
Their withering March,—
If it bless them or ban them,
Ripen or rot them,
Leaves them silent
Without reply.

Frail and hurrying
Child of darkness,
Spun for a moment
In sparkling blue,
With night behind me,
And night before me,
And blind as the sage is,
And dark as the fool,—
Can I,—presuming,
Where all before me
Have failed, have fall'n
By Sphinx devour'd,—
Can I in this moment
Garner a harvest
Where no man hath gathered
One sheaf from time?
Vain is the effort!

THE AUTUMN GARDEN

Better in silence
Breathe the datura's
Ineffable breath,—
Take, in patience,
The delicate pleasure
That flowers and waters
And clouds procure.

Nay, but a glimmer,
Faint as a sparkle
Caught from the mirror
Of wind-touch'd wave,
Flashes within me;
Wakens a feeling
Scarce articulate,
Finer than thought;
Hints that the secret
Pulses of being
Aim at no wonder
Beyond themselves;
That light and odour,
Stillness and movement,
The bell that summons,
But not the prayer,
Hope in its progress,
But not fruition,
The oar that impels us,
But not the port,—
Life in living,
The urgent instinct,—
These are the intimate
Issues of life!

Give me the wisdom
To glide, and gliding

THE AUTUMN GARDEN

Take the happiness,
Take the pain;
Know myself to be
Less than a petal
Floating in fragrance
Down to the lake.
Weakness of mortals!
Impotent butterflies
Beat their tremulous
Radiant vans,
Dream of morrows
Beyond to-morrow,
Probe for honey
In honeyless blooms.
Moment by moment
Ah! to be telling
Ever the pulses
Of perilous time;
This is your answer,
Martyr and lover!
This is the guerdon,
This the crown!

THE DEATH OF PROCRIS

To J. E. H.

Poor jealous Procris in the Cretan wood,
Slain by the very hand of love at last!
This way was best! the cordial bath of blood,
The long love-sickness past.

The brown fauns gather round with piteous cries;
They mourn her beauty, guess not at her woe;
They find no Eos graven on those eyes
Whence tears no longer flow.

Her griefs, her frailties from the flowery turf
Exhaled, are as the dews of yesterday;
The grim ship hurrying through the Phocian surf,
The exile on her way,

The cruel goddess, and the twofold test,
The breaking heart of hate, the poisoned hours,—
All these have faded into utter rest
Among the Cretan flowers.

Ah! wrap her body in its fluttering lawns!
'Tis Cephalus' own shaft that hath made cease
The passion of her breast; hush, foolish fauns,
Hush! for her end was peace.

SONNETS

SHIPS ON THE SEA

FAR down the dim horizon of my soul
White are the sails of friends beloved and lost;
Great ships that in mid-sea my pinnace crost,
That hailed it cheerly o'er the long waves' roll.

All, all have reached their harbour and their goal;
I still ride out the storm-wind and the frost;
By futile hopes and wavering passions tost,
I miss their broader sway and strong control.

But not in vain beneath their lofty shade
I danced awhile, frail plaything of the seas;
Unfit to brave the ampler main with these;
Yet, by the instinct which their souls obeyed,
Less steadfast, o'er the trackless wave I strayed,
And follow still their vanishing trestle-trees.

R. B.

His soul went singing like a mountaineer
Who climbs the hills, and carols as he climbs;
Above the snows he heard the faëry chimes
Of God's faint bells, and felt no shade of fear.

He leaped in faith from year to glimmering year;
Nothing to him seemed poor or vile or vain,
Since all the fibres of his heart and brain
Were braced by hope's high Alpine atmosphere.

I have known no goodlier spirit! Where he walked,
Love masqueraded in rough skins and claws,
Feigning to be some monster of the woods;

Loud was the voice wherewith he rhymed and talked,
But warmer heart, or moved in kindlier cause,
Was never stirred by man's vicissitudes.

J. A. S.

THOU, who, in thine own bitter words, didst keep
A burning heart amid the eternal snows,—
Say, whether in the garth of death there grows
A herb to staunch thy grief and yield thee sleep.

Breathe gentlier, gentlier there! oh slumber deep
No more the fangs of fruitless longing close
Fast in that flesh from which the life-blood flows,
Back from that brow the clouds of torture sweep.

Beyond the lot of man thou sufferedst pain;
But thy great spirit, through the winnowing fire,
Like noblest metal from a raging pyre,

Ran, liquid light, a stream of sparkling rain,
Indomitably daring, gold of brain
Fused from the ore of torments gross and dire.

R. L. S.

REST, oh thou restless angel, rest at last,
High on thy mountain peak that caps the waves;
Anguish no more thy delicate soul enslaves,
Dream-clouds no more thy slumber overcast.

Adventurous angel, fold thy wings! the vast
Pacific forest, with its architraves,
The stillness of its long liana'd naves,
Involves thee in a silence of times past.

Thou whom we loved, a child of sportive whim,
So fair to play with, comfort, thrill or chide,
Art grown as ancient as thine island gods,

As mystic as the menacing seraphim,
As grim as priests upon a red hill-side,
Or lictors shouldering high their sheaves of rods.

THE VOTIVE TREE

Sprawled on the harsh sea-sand, Lentinus found
A rough wild olive, on whose branches grew
Strange foliage—wind-dried garments not a few,
Festoons of seaweed, battered medals bound

Like fruits, and tinkling with a shaken sound,—
Things ragged, mean, deplorable to view;
But he was moved and gladdened, for he knew
The pious token and the prayer profound.

These were the gifts of sailors, who had felt
Death, in a dream, like cold wind thro' their hair,
And, wakening, found the horror ebbed away;

So that beneath that tree Lentinus knelt,
As at a chapel entered unaware,
And blessed the gods whom storms and seas obey.

THE RHODODENDRON

Love clasps his arms around the awakening bride,
Till from the sullen foliage of her heart
Passion and thought and hope impulsive start:
So April, down this rolling garden-side,

Wakes blossom on the rhododendron's crest,—
Volcanic crimson from a burning world,
Fire, buried and lost, in maiden foliage furled,
Now blazoned to the waters and the West.

For, all the smouldering embers of her soul
Lay hidden in glossy darkness with no sign,
Till Love, onrushing like a storm unseal'd,

Scatter'd the bud-sheaths, and the glowing coal,
In flames like petals, with a scent of wine,
Leapt furious, and the Woman smiled,
revealed.

Mountstewart, April 14, 1906.

THE TYRANT DREAM

This living world seems dazed and submarine,
Drenched in the lunar splendour of the night,
And, like owls' golden eyes, are sparkling bright
Stars thro' the beechen boughs that intervene;

And down this vitreous wilderness of green
Thy pale fantastic shade, O false delight,
Importunately challenges the flight
Of feebler fancies, cool and mild and mean.

Dream, I forbade thy presence here with me!
Hot shade, I drave thee from my paradise!
Delight, thou shouldst enslave my heart no more!

But, in this glassy night of reverie,
Thou hast rent the daylight artifice of lies!
Tyrannic dream, entrance me as before.

SONNETS

MELANCHOLY IN THE GARDEN

I

THE winds that dash these August dahlias down,
And chase the streams of light across the grass,
This solemn watery air, like clouded glass,
This perfume on the terrace bare and brown,

Are like the soundless flush of full renown
That gathers with the gathering years that pass,
And weaves for happy, glorious life, alas!
Of sorrow and of solitude a crown.

I know not what this load is on my heart,
But down these alleys I have loved so long,
Filled from old years with retrospect and song,

I wander aimless, ready to depart,
Prepared to welcome, with no frightened start,
The spectral summons and the shrouded throng.

II

"Nature hath spent at last her shining store,
And I have lived my day," the painter said,
Who felt the arrowy throe, the dizzied head,
And laid his palette down for evermore.

Well had he learned the melancholy lore
That trains the rose, without a murmur made,
To break the clusters of her royal red,
And strew her beauty on the windy shore.

Some warning, surely, must I read to-night,
In flower and tree, in flying light and cloud;
It is the voice of Death, not near, nor loud,

But whispering from some cypress out of sight,
That bids me hearken for the feathery flight,
And draw my robe across my shoulders bowed.

A PARALLEL

To R. R.

O'ER many a wish frustrated, purpose foiled,
Still dost thou weep, discouraged Soul of Man?
Be comforted, since even Nature can
Too rarely triumph fully where she toiled;

Behold the tree, the flower, the cloud despoiled
Of beauty, which was virtue in her plan;
A thousand times her purposes outran
Their issues, maimed and crippled, bent and soiled.

If many evenings close in faintest gray
Before one glorious sunset crowns the day,
If, for one oak, a myriad acorns rot,

If Nature fails a thousand times ere one
Clear master-stroke of beauty fronts the sun,
Man's frequent frailty may deject him not.

SOCIAL REVOLUTION

To A. C. B.

Heroic counsel shook our hearts to-day,
Where new-mown grass perfumed your hedge-row-dell;
Blue lights across your mangold-wurzel fell,
And Ely shone, a phantom far away.

We spoke of coming claims for social sway,
Of rising horde and shattered citadel,
And one thought all things surely must be well,
And one had little faith, and murmured "Nay!"

Then, in the primrose sunset of July,
Homeward along the Hinton fields we came,
And each to other questioning made reply

That man and God and nation were the same
When fen-pools mirrored that far minster-flame,—
And would be, while men toiled beneath the sky.

LABOUR AND LOVE

To M. B.

Labour and love! there are no other laws
To rule the liberal action of that soul
Which faith hath set beneath thy brief control,
Or lull the empty fear that racks and gnaws;

Labour! then, like a rising moon, the cause
Of life shall light thine hour from pole to pole;
Thou shalt taste health of purpose, and the roll
Of simple joys unwind without a pause.

Love! and thy heart shall cease to question why
Its beating pulse was set to rock and rave;
Find but another heart this side the grave

To soothe and cling to,—thou hast life's reply.
Labour and love! then fade without a sigh,
Submerged beneath the inexorable wave.

RUIN

As I was walking in my lunar dream
  Up those dim stairs that lead to break of day,
  My soul's chimera barred the starry way,
And broke the thread-like hope, the glimmering
    beam;

Methought my spirit pealed a stifled scream,—
  So hideous-fair the monster, loud and gay,
  So turbulent and blithe, in riotous play.
It called upon me, shouting, to blaspheme:

And my weak flesh, pledg'd to God's work and word,
Discreet and mild, subdued to yearn and learn,
  Almost redeemed, a blanching miracle,—
Flushing deep red, with acrid juices stirred,
Before this vast brute, gross and taciturn,
  Rolled, crashing, back into the heart of hell.

OPIUM HARVEST

High up in hollow valleys where dim lakes
  In Karahissar find no watershed,
  By many a snow-gorged roaring river-bed,
In long white fluttering waves the poppy shakes;

But spring-tide comes at last, and April wakes,
  And tears the petals from the golden head,
  Till, of its pink wings disinherited,
The opium-laden capsule bends and bakes.

Then, after sunset, the sleek farmers creep
  To slash the poppy-globes, and leave them soon
  Oozing green tears beneath the gibbous moon;

Tears, that in scallop-shells, when dawn shall peep,
  Patient, they'll gather; then, dismiss the boon
Round the wide world in bales of solid sleep.

THE GARDEN OF CHRIST'S

Beneath this turf lie roses whose pale blood
The very hand of Milton may have shed,
Or wreck of bays once pleated for the head
Of Quarles, whose early modesty withstood
No well-meant clamour of a student-brood;
Great poets here, and Platonists long dead,
By feathered Clio and Urania led,
Have waited for the moment and the mood.

Ah! who shall say these warm and russet walls,
This lustrous pool upon whose mirror falls
The shadow of so many an ancient tree,
Embrace not still the past, as perfumes hold
The spirits of flowers that may no more unfold
Their living buds by any lake or lea?

A SYRIAN INSCRIPTION

BENEATH this arch, I, Tabnit, lie at rest;
I, Tabnit, Priest of Ashtoreth, and King
Of Sidon where the tideless waters swing.
O man, with hands and footsteps all unblest,
Who comest, an unseasonable guest,
Depart in haste, nor o'er my ashes fling
Thy furtive shadow. Go, nor dream I bring
Silver and gold for thy unhallowed quest.

Else,—if this screed thou connest, and dost yet
Presume upon my slumber,—be there shed
The curse of Ashtoreth on thy moonstruck head;
Thee may the living in thy life forget,
No seed in fields of childhood mayest thou set,
Nor couch at last among the peaceful dead.

SONGS OF ROSES

I

ROSE FANTASIA

Rose, that flushing hues didst borrow
From my lute,
Pink for joy and pale for sorrow,—
Now 'tis mute,
Droop thine amber lids, and sleep
In a tide of perfume deep,
Till the sap of music creep
To thy root.

Dream; then die the death of roses
With no pain,
Till the yellowing wreck uncloses
In the rain,
And the ghost of music springs
On its dim gray moth-like wings
To my lute's neglected strings
Once again.

II

THE MISSIVE

I THAT tumble at your feet
Am a rose;
Nothing dewier or more sweet
Buds or blows.
He that plucked me, he that threw me
Breathed in fire his whole soul through me.

How the cold air is infused
With the scent!
See, this satin leaf is bruised,—
Bruised and bent.
Lift me, lift the wounded blossom,
Soothe it at your rosier bosom!

Frown not with averted eyes!
Joy's a flower,
That is born a god, and dies
In an hour.
Take me, for the summer closes,
And your life is but a rose's.

III

THE ROSE OF SORROW

THE royal rose our sovereign bard bewitches;
Three roses crown his lyre;
The red is Conquest; and the yellow, Riches;
The damask rose, Desire.

But o'er the airs with which his strings are ringing,
One rose hangs out of sight;
Of the white rose he never dreams of singing,—
For Sorrow's rose is white.

IV

THE FALLEN ROSE

LIFE, like an overweighted shaken rose,
Falls, in a cloud of colour, to my feet;
Its petals strew my first November snows,
Too soon, too fleet!

'Twas my own breath had blown the leaves apart,
My own hot eyelids stirred them where they lay;
It was the tumult of my own bright heart
Broke them away.

THE VANISHING BOAT

(Henry Sidgwick)

He is dying,—
He is dying in England in the clammy heat,
And, in the quiet room where he is lying,
The coverlet is white from head to feet,
Like this white fjord beneath this milky sky.
I sit, and almost see him die.
Here where the tender evening-breeze is sighing
Along the beech-wood coverts, sigh on sigh,
Where all the lingering airs are cool and sweet
With woodruff and the soft, crush'd juniper,
And scarce a bough can stir,
It is so still here in the fading day;
And there, in England, miles and miles away,
He is dying.

All messages come slowly
To this pure haunt of sylvan loneliness;
Perchance even now he hath put off the stress
Of life, and its extremest weariness,
For rest more calm and holy.
I know not if the face I seem to see
Upon the long white visionary bed
Be living still, or hath been some time dead;
For it is shrouded wholly,
As by the mist that lifts from off the sea,
As by the wood-smoke drifting in the wood.
I know not if I greet my friend
Still here, but sinking to an end;
Or gaze across the interlude
Of a cold beginning mystery;
Or see before me lying stiff and frore
The statue that is he no more.

Howe'er it be, farewell!
Farewell, from shining fjord and pine-clad fell,
From odorous brae and unfamiliar shore,—
Now I shall see that sacred face no more;
No longer from those mild, transfigured eyes
See flash the gracious miracle
Of sympathetic thoughts and sage replies,—
Those eyes that were the store
Of kindness unreproving, keen and wise.

Farewell, farewell!
The darkness gathers round me in the bell
Of cowslip-coloured air;
And the long coast beyond grows pale and faint.
A little vanishing boat returning thither
Sends silver streamers in her wake,
Altho' her oars scarce break
The lucent mirror of the lake.
She passes into silence and dim light,
She fades into the cowslip-coloured night,—
She passes,—whither?

I know not. But I know
From me the silent occupant must go;
Whatever message to this shore he brought,
Whatever comforting of heart's annoy,
Whatever cargo of clear thought,
Whatever freight of hope and joy,—
His hour is over and his mission done.
Thanks for the long day's happy work he wrought,
Thanks for his cheerful toil beneath the sun,
Thanks for the victories he won.
Now, late at evening, with a silver thread
Of loving memories in his wake, he goes.

THE VANISHING BOAT

Perchance the distance brings him what he sought,
Perchance the further shore, where he is fled,
Is mirage to the dead.
Who knows, who knows?

To all at length an end!
All sailors to some unseen harbour float.
Farewell, mysterious, happy, twilight boat.
Farewell, my friend!

Munkebjerg, Jutland,
August 1900.

AUBREY DE VERE

1814–1902

In the far romantic morning, when the bards in
golden weather,
Ringed with dew and light and music, struck their
giant lyres together,
Came a child and stood beside them, gazed adoring
in their eyes,
Hushed his little heart in worship of a race so calm
and wise.

They are gone, those gods and giants, caught Elijah-
like to glory,
Now their triumphs and their sorrows are a part of
England's story;
Years and years agone they vanished; but the child
who loved them well,
Still has held the ear of mortals with a far-off tale to
tell.

Theirs were voices heard like harps above the con-
gregated thunder;
His, a trembling hymn to beauty, or a breath of
whispered wonder;
When the world's tongue spoke, he faltered; but
above the turmoil rolled
Fragments of romantic rapture, echoes of the age of
gold.

Others stun the years to homage with their novelty
and splendour;
He was shy and backward-gazing, but his noiseless
soul was tender.

When he sang, the birds sang louder, for his accents,
low and clear,
Never hushed a mourning cushat, never scared a
sunning deer.

Now the last of all who communed with the mighty
bards has perished;
He is part of that eternity he prophesied and
cherished;
Now the child, the whisperer passes; now extremity
of age
Shuts the pure memorial volume, turns the long and
stainless page.

Where some westward-hurrying river to the bright
Atlantic dashes,
In some faint enchanted Celtic woodland hide this
poet's ashes,
That the souls of those old singers whom the clans
of song hold dear,
Nightly may return to hover o'er the grave of their
De Vere.

FOR A TOMB AT CANTERBURY

E. W. B., October 11, 1896

No pain that mars the trembling brow,
No flutterings of the soul were his;
Death, shaken softly from its bough,
Dropt downward, and its touch a kiss.

Clasped in a cloud of secret prayer,
Faint, from the upland path he trod,
Sighing, he sank through veils of air,—
Then round him felt the Arms of God.

DIRGE

JOHN RUSKIN, JANUARY 1900

MOURN, upward-stealing vapours, sunset-amber,
  Cirrhus and cumulus of fire and snow!
No more against the clambering west-wind clamber,
  But pour your tears upon the mead below,
  Since he who shepherded your cohort slow,
Who named and loved and watched you, one by one,
Goes darkly down to that immortal chamber,
Whence he shall never see you blot the sun,
  Nor chase and toss the dancing stars on high,
Nor weave your tender woof, when day is done,
                Over the silken sky.

Mourn, mourn, ye Alps, whose crystal paradises
  Know neither space nor time, save when and where
The avalanche from desperate precipices
  Tolls a rude thundering hour through shuddering air,
  He who amongst you walked, and named you fair,
And traced each delicate hornèd crest with joy,
And justified your savage sacrifices,
Him shall no more your azure glens decoy;
  Far from your silver light, your starry gust,
Him to eternal stillness tears convoy,
                To silence and to dust.

MADRIGAL ON THE BIRTHDAY OF QUEEN VICTORIA

Lady on the silver throne,
Like the moon thou art to me,
Something bright, august and lone,
Infinite in majesty!
How can I, a pilgrim, sing
Such a dazzling, distant thing?

But the Moon came down to earth,
Wiping tears from human eyes;
Thou dost bend to grief and mirth,
Woman in thy smiles and sighs;
Empress, take the human praise
That a subject dares not raise.

TO HENRIK IBSEN ON ENTERING HIS SEVENTY-FIFTH YEAR, MARCH 20, 1902

Red Star, that on the forehead of the North
Hast flared so high and with so fierce a blaze,
Thy long vermilion light still issues forth
Through night of fir-woods down the water-ways,
In urgent wrath of sinister wild rays;
Lower it falls, and nearer to the sea,—
But still the dark horizon flames with thee.

All stars and suns roll their predestined course,
Invade the zenith, poise, then downward turn;
Thrust onward by some godlike secret force,
They sparkle, flush, and, e'er they fade, they burn,
Each quenched at last in its historic urn;
Each sloping to its cold material grave;
Yet each remembered by the light it gave.

Thy radiance, angry Star, shall fill the sky,
When all thy mortal being hath decayed;
Thine is a splendour never doomed to die,
Long clouded by man's vapours, long delayed,
But risen at last above all envious shade:
Amid the pearly throng of lyric stars,
Thy fighting orb has stormed the sky like Mars.

And when the slow revolving years have driven
All softer fire below the western wave,
Though strange new planets crowd our startled heaven,
The soul will still bear on its architrave
The light, reflected, that thy lustre gave.
Hail, burning Star! A dazzled Magian, I
Kneel to thy red refulgence till I die.

POEMS WRITTEN IN NORWAY IN 1899

I

THE PENINSULA

The lilac ling my bed, I lay
  In that entranced half-isle of ours,—
That Sirmio of a northern bay,
  Paven with tiny leaves and flowers;—
Ancestral birches down the blue
Their waterfalls of silver threw.

Between their gnarl'd and papery boughs
  The radiant lake burned in the sun;
I looked out of their fairy house,
  And watched the waves break one by one—
Reverberant turquoise shattered there
Between green earth and golden air.

Hot in the breeze, the distant pines
  Cast wafts of spice across our shore;
And unseen rosemaries gave signs,
  And secret junipers their store;
From every flower and herb and tree
Sabæan odours sighed to me.

And all things sang, too,—the soft wind,
  The birch-leaves' petulant, shy sound,
The lapping waters, and the thinned
  Sleek tufts of autumn leafage browned,
The cow-bell far away, that fills
All corners of the folded hills.

Thus odour, song, and colour wrought
  A magic raiment for my soul:
All the dark garments pain had brought
  To robe me for the masque of dole
Fell from me straightway; I was clad
As angels when God makes them glad.

Blue, golden-green, and silver-white—
  Were these not hues for happiness?
In our elysian island bright,
  Round the worn pilgrim still they press;
They dress him for the world anew,
These spirits of white and green and blue.

And so for hours I laid my head
  Upon the lilac spires of ling,
And thus, by Beauty islanded,
  I heard the lustral waters sing,
And watched the low wind stir the gold
And turn the quavering birch-leaves cold.

Næset i Bygland,
August 4.

II

THE CATARACT

From slippery slab to slab I crawl
Above the shattering waterfall.

A mist, like hopeless human prayer,
Curls in the firs and welters there.

Through them I watch descend, descend
The shuddering waters without end.

Gray tears have fallen to swell this flood,
And iron-ruddy drops like blood.

It moans, and sobs, and howls, and sings,
And whispers of heart-breaking things.

For ages it has thundered so
Into the slate-blue lake below.

Each streak of blood, each cold gray tear,
Sinks down into the sullen mere.

Sinks down, and vanishes, and dies,
Yet the lake's borders never rise.

So to God's silent heart are hurled
The sorrows of the unsuccoured world.

Tinnfossen, August 19.

III

THE LAKE

NEVERMORE sail or oar
Hears the chorus that once bore us
To the shore,
Where the birches shake their tresses
From the outmost sandy nesses.

Fare ye well, brae and dell,
And our meadow, deep in shadow!
Never tell
How we loved your pleasant reaches
And the shade of your sleek beeches.

Hours and hours, sun and showers,
Quiet-breasted, here we rested
By your flowers.
Flowers will fade and life is tragic;
Keep, sweet lake, your breathless magic.

To your shore nevermore
Come we sailing, blithely hailing,
As of yore;
To return would break asunder
All the threads we wove in wonder.

Then, adieu! not of you
Shall a broken heart be token,
Wavelets blue!
We must steer our barque of sorrow
To some darker shore to-morrow.

Byglandsfjorden,
August 15.

IV

VERSES

Written in the album of Anna Björnaraa, the composer and singer of *Stev*, where many Norwegian and Danish poets had written.

HERE, where below the bastion of the hills
Immortal song still gushes like a fountain,
And with its delicate enchantment fills
The granite goblet of the hollow mountain,
I come, the pilgrim of an alien clime,
And croon a stave with these my Northland brothers,
Since more than blood-kin is the bond of rhyme,
And sisters were our ancient Muses' mothers.

Vik i Valle, Sætersdalen,
August 8.

A SONG FOR THE NEW YEAR

WHAT graven words shall mark as mine
This milestone of a year?
What prayer shall be the worthy sign
Of all I hope and fear?
Not greed for gold—
I'm growing old;
Burdens I dare no more uphold;
Nor deem I meet for weary feet
The dust and struggle of the street.

Then shall I wish for utter peace?
For light with calm around?
For all the stir of life to cease
In apathy profound?
Ah! no, too long
I've warred with wrong;
I've loved the clash of battle-song;
For me, to drone in ease alone
Were heavier than a churchyard stone.

And fame? Alas! it comes too late,
Or, coming, flies too soon;
It dawns, as o'er the meadow-gate,
Peers up the yellow moon;
It glows in power
One feverish hour,
Then passes like a perish'd flower;
Or sets, to rise in alien skies,
And cheat me of my lawful prize.

Why, then, my New Year's wish shall be
For love, and love alone;
More hands to hold out joy to me,
More hearts for me to own;
And if the gain
In part be pain,—
Since time but gives to take again,—
Yet more than gold a thousandfold
Is love that's neither bought nor sold.

THE LAND OF FRANCE

To Andre Gide

Sometimes at night before the fire I sit,
To ponder in that lonely hour of dream,
When o'er the hearth the ghosts of memory flit,
And dear dead faces in the embers gleam;
The days in multitudes beside me stream,
While joy recaptures many a province fair,
Glowing, and luminous, and debonair.

Little it matters where my dreams begin;
Since, like a feathery seed upon the wind,
Southward my fancy can but speed and spin,
Until beneath my poising brain I find
The soul of rustic loveliness, reclin'd
In some French woodland quivering to the west,
Or clad with flower-gold on some French hill's crest.

Sands of Dunkirk are not too cold for me;
Nor dales of Roussillon too full of fire;
Down Tarn and Lot my memory leaps in glee;
Long miles of poplar'd Anjou cannot tire
Feet that to frost-capp'd Dauphiné aspire;
Shouting of waves which on black Penmarch fall—
Slow streams at Aiguës-Mortes—I love them all!

France! take my hands in those kind hands of thine;
Like a chill swallow to thy fields I fly!
Warmth, beauty, calm and happiness are mine
When o'er me bends that soft and radiant sky,
When in that vivid atmosphere I sigh—
Sigh, for pure gladness, while my pulses dance
A joyful measure to the praise of France.

EPILOGUE

Before my tale of days is told,
  O may I watch, on reverent knees,
The Unknown Beauty once unfold
  The magic of her mysteries!

Before I die, O may I see,
  Clasp'd in her violet girdle, Spring;
May April breezes blow to me
  Songs that the youngest poets sing!

Old eyes are dull to sights unseen,
  Old ears are dull to songs unsung,
But if the heart stay warm and green,
  Perchance the senses may keep young.

Howe'er it be, I will not quail
  To tell the lapse of years like sand;
My faith in beauty shall not fail
  Because I fail to understand.

New arts, new raptures, new desires
  Will stir the new-born souls of men;
New fingers smite new-fashioned lyres,—
  And O! may I be listening then.

The centaur crashes thro' the wood,
  And shoots his arrow there and thus:
Shall I prefer my solitude
  Because his form be fabulous?

Shall I reject the green and rose
  Of opals, with their shifting flame,
Because the classic diamond glows
  With lustre that is still the same?

EPILOGUE

Change is the pulse of life on earth;
  The artist dies, but Art lives on;
New rhapsodies are ripe for birth
  When every rhapsodist seems gone.

So, if I pray for length of days,
  It is not in the barren pride
That looks behind itself, and says,
  "The Past alone is deified!"

Nay, humbly, shrinkingly, in dread
  Of fires too splendid to be borne,—
In expectation lest my head
  Be from its Orphic shoulders torn,—

I wait, till, down the eastern sky
  Muses, like Mænads in a throng,
Sweep my decayed traditions by,
  In startling tones of unknown song.

So, to my days' extremity,
  May I, in patience infinite,
Attend the beauty that must be,
  And, though it slay me, welcome it.

THE END

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